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OR,

The Conspirator's Son.

A Romance of the West Indies.

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BY COLONEL PRENTISS INGRAHAM,
AUTHOR OF "MERLE, THE MUTINEER," "MON-
TEZUMA, THE MERCILESS," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

THE PIRATES OF THE LAGOON.

ALONG the beautiful shores of the ever lovely Island of Cuba, two vessels were gliding along, under a breeze that logged for them six knots an hour. Both were of the class known in Cuban waters as *goletas*, and were about the same size; but, where one was a trim, saucy-looking craft, evidently the yacht of some wealthy planter or dignitary, the other sadly needed painting, her sails were weather-worn and patched and she had evidently seen hard service.

But the eye of a thorough sailor would have

HE WAS PERFECTLY CALM, THOUGH THE FLAMES WERE SWEEPING TOWARD HIM.

detected in the weather-worn craft an air of neatness about her rig and decks that showed discipline in her skipper, for every rope was in its place, the sails set, patched though they were, flat as boards and without a wrinkle, while the hull was shapely in the extreme and equally as good a model as was the other vessel.

The crew of the little trader, for such she evidently was, consisted of four dark-faced men, Cubans without doubt, a negro man, and a youth just upon the threshold of manhood.

The latter was at the helm and was evidently the skipper, or master of the craft, for his dress was of a better texture than that of his companions, and there was an air of neatness about him that was almost foppish.

His form was tall, athletic and graceful, and his face was not so dark as the complexion of his Cuban crew, and yet he seemed to have Spanish blood in his veins.

His face was one to attract, one to admire, for it bore the stamp of a noble nature, and, withal, one of intelligence, resolution and daring.

His hands and feet were small, and yet the one that rested upon the tiller held it in a grip that denoted strength.

Dressed in snowy duck pants, pump shoes, a blue flannel shirt, with a broad turnover collar, in the points of which was worked an anchor in silver, a black silk scarf, knotted sailor fashion, and with a white Panama straw hat, encircled by a silver cord, he certainly presented a most *debonnaire* appearance, one to catch the eye of the fair sex at all times.

Instead of a belt he wore a silk sash of blue, and in it was thrust a long-bladed knife with a hilt that was exquisitely carved.

The young skipper and his crew had their eyes alternately upon their vessel and the *goleta*, distant half a mile from them.

The latter was a mile away from the steep, wooded shores of Cuba, and those on her decks had been engaged in watching the beautiful scenery as it opened to their view, and gazing upon the little trader which had been steadily overhauling them the past three hours, until now it was bow for bow.

The yacht, for such the *goleta* in-shore was, had the flag of Spain fluttering over her decks aft, while at the fore were the colors of her owner, a gold star in a blue field.

Her sails were new, set well, and she spread a large quantity of canvas, while her hull was an exquisite model, and the sharp bows cut through the waters like a knife.

Aft, under an awning, which in the light breeze had been spread, were divans, rugs and easy-chairs, and there were congregated half a dozen people, while forward and amidships were the crew, six in number and dressed in a neat uniform.

At the tiller stood a seaman, and by him, coursing the sailing of his vessel, was a young man, the yacht's skipper, and who possessed a dark, handsome face that denoted his Spanish blood.

Seated in one of the easy-chairs, while a negress stood by her side lazily fanning her, was a matron, whose appearance would indicate the lady of wealth and refinement.

Near her, half-reclining upon a divan, and with her gaze upon the little trading craft, rather than the beautiful scenery, was a Cuban maiden, scarcely over sixteen and beautiful to a marked degree.

Just verging into womanhood, her form was perfection, and her large, deer-like eyes, seemed full of tenderness and love.

By her side, a *cigarrito* between his lips, sat a man in the fatigue uniform of a Spanish major, and with a face that was striking rather than handsome.

He was a man of thirty, and his looks indicated that he had seen much of the world and rather enjoyed it to the full.

A gentleman of fifty, with iron-gray hair and mustache, a shrewd rather than an intelligent face, and the dress of a Cuban planter, completed the group, excepting a negro slave, who stood near the mainmast, where stood a small table, upon which was a silver salver containing decanters, a silver pitcher of sherbet, stand of cigars and sweetmeats.

"I cannot understand it, Senor Major; the craft is really outsailing us, and I believed I had the fastest vessel afloat," said the planter, with a look of annoyance as he glanced at the little trader, which was now directly abeam.

"That craft, Senor Camblas, I cannot understand, for three hours ago she was a mile astern, and now, with less sail set than the Valita, she is abeam," answered Major Ramel Rovalez, with an admiring glance at the Cuban maiden, who said dryly, but in a low, musical voice:

"I can understand it, senors."

All eyes were upon the maiden, while the mother, the Senora Camblas, asked, somewhat reproachfully:

"How can you understand, Valita, what Major Rovalez does not?"

"Perhaps my eyesight is better, mother; but, I understand why the trader is where she is now, when, three hours ago, she was a mile astern."

"Pray tell us then, my child, for it puzzles me," said Senor Camblas.

"Because she is the faster vessel," responded Valita, with a sweet smile.

The Cuban uttered something very like *caramba!* his wife laughed, and the major looked like one who did not enjoy the joke.

"The trader has steadily gained, although the Valita cannot set another sail, and has more now than her rival. But, if a stiff breeze were to favor us, the Valita would sail away from her, I am sure," spoke the planter.

"I doubt that, father, for yonder craft is no yacht for pleasant weather only."

"What is it, Nunez?" cried the planter, as he saw his sailing-master suddenly speak to the helmsman in a low, excited tone, and point northward.

"Ah, senor! the Pirates of the Lagoons! See—there!"

All were upon their feet in an instant, and every eye was turned in the direction indicated by Nunez.

There, shooting out from the dark shadows of the overhanging hills, came two long, low, black boats, a dozen oarsmen in each, heading straight for the yacht, and running at a terrific speed.

"The Pirates of the Lagoons!"

"We are lost!" cried the Senor Camblas in a voice of terror.

"Ho, all! We must beat them off, or we are lost! Arm yourselves, all!" shouted the major in commanding tones; and at once all was excitement on board, for in the light breeze then blowing they knew that escape was impossible, and the Lagoon Pirates all knew were merciless.

CHAPTER II.

AN UNLOOKED-FOR ALLY.

THE Lagoon Pirates of Cuba were to be feared.

Just who they were nobody seemed to know, for it was said that they were mountain robbers as well as buccaners.

They were never found when searched for by vessels-of-war; but when not expected they would dash out from their hiding-places upon the merchant vessel that had approached within easy reach of the shore.

Their boats carried no sails, were long, low, canoe-like in shape, and yet were as stanch as any skiffs.

The oarsmen sent them along at a ten-knot pace, and few vessels they were headed for could escape them.

Pursued and followed to the lagoons, as they had often been by armed parties, neither they nor their boats could be found.

Into the mountains it was said they went, and when, as was now and then the case, plantations would be raided, and the raiders pursued, they would go toward the coast and there disappear as mysteriously as though they had gone into the sea to their death.

So it was said that the Mountain Robbers and the Lagoon Pirates were one and the same band.

When the wind was light, and a vessel within a league of the shore, it was almost sure to be a prey to the Lagoon Pirates.

They seldom went further than a league from the shore, and thoroughly armed, desperate men, they were not beaten off very readily.

Merciless they certainly were, and they were wont to cover up their tracks by burning a vessel and putting the crew to death, upon the principle that "dead men tell no tales."

Such were the Lagoon Pirates, who were dashing upon the pretty Cuban yacht, which, barely sailing four knots an hour, and with but a small crew to defend her, must fall an easy prey to the outlaws.

Naturally Major Ramel Rovalez took the leadership of the yacht's crew, for he was a Spanish officer who had won fame upon many a battle-field.

The Senor Camblas was fearful of his life, and the lives of his wife and daughter. He loved gold, but feared steel and lead; but, when life was at stake he was willing to pay out liberally, so said anxiously:

"Cannot we treat with those fellows, Senor Major?"

"No, Senor Camblas; they are merciless, and they will accept no terms, well knowing that they could collect no draft you might give them.

"We must fight them."

The planter at once went below, to tell his wife the result of his proposition, and it is likely he would have stayed there, for he was not a "warrior bold" but that Major Rovalez called him again on deck.

"Senor, we must try and beat them off," said the major.

"And if we fail?"

"We are doomed; but we have much to fight for, and may beat them back."

Then the major, who had stationed the crew, and armed them, gave the order to fire.

The guns flashed, and the bullets went flying away toward the boats.

One of the Lagoon Pirates was seen to fall across the gunwale, and another's oar was let go.

But they still came on.

"Again, fire!" shouted Major Rovalez.

Once more the guns flashed, but with no result that could be seen.

Hastily they were reloaded and fired a third time.

A pirate fell from his seat, but the boats still came on.

"Now your small-arms!" shouted Major Rovalez, drawing his pistol in one hand, his sword in the other.

Then there was a scattering volley, a wild yell, a shock, as the boats struck the yacht, and the pirates had gained the deck.

That all hope was gone, Major Rovalez knew, but he was a brave man and meant to fight to the end.

Suddenly rung out the words in Spanish:

"Now at them, lads!"

There was a yell, and over the other side of the yacht came a dozen men, armed with cutlasses and pistols.

At their head was the handsome young skipper of the trader craft, and his onslaught was irresistible.

Standing in the companionway, with pale, scared face, was Valita Camblas.

She had heard her father's cry that all was lost, and she had sprung to where she could see the decks and know the worst.

Just at that moment the boat from the trader had run alongside, and she beheld the gallant charge of the young skipper, leading his men.

She saw him cut down two of the pirates with his cutlass, and then force the rest into their boats.

Hardly had the Lagoon Pirates sprung back into their long boats, leaving more than half of their number dead upon the yacht's deck, when the young skipper called out:

"To your boat, men, and follow them! Drive them to their den!"

Instantly the men obeyed and the trader's boat started in hot chase, the men rowing with the quick, strong stroke of a well-trained crew, and those who were not at the oars firing upon the retreating outlaws.

"The boat to the starboard, men!" cried the skipper, and the entire fire was concentrated upon that boat.

The Lagoon Pirates carried no muskets or rifles. They dealt only with the pistol and cutlass, seeking close quarters for their red work, so they could not fire upon their pursuers, and one by one the oarsmen in the starboard boat fell, until but one remained, and he threw himself down to escape that deadly fire.

"Now the boat to port!" cried the daring young skipper, and the men kept up a steady fire upon the other boat.

Just before it reached the land the pursuers were upon them, but the unwounded pirates sprung overboard and escaped, while the one left in the first boat attacked had already done likewise.

The two long canoes were taken in tow, with half a dozen dead pirates in each, and the victors started back for the yacht, down toward which the trader was now standing, under two men left on board of her.

In the mean time, Major Rovalez had quickly had the bodies of the dead pirates tossed into the sea, from the deck of the Valita, while the three wounded men on the yacht were cared for, and the two dead were carried forward and reverently covered from sight.

"That band of Lagoon Pirates won't trouble you again, senor," said the young skipper, as he was rowing by the yacht to board his own vessel.

"Ho! my man, come on board, for I wish to reward you!" called out Senor Camblas.

"If that is your purpose, senor, I care not to come. I accept no pay for doing my duty," was the haughty reply.

"Well said! Yet the fellow is impudent," remarked the major, and aloud he called out:

"Come alongside, sir, for I wish to speak to you."

The skipper put his helm down and ran his boat alongside of the yacht, springing lightly upon her deck, and doffing his Panama hat with a low bow, as he saw the Senora and Senorita Camblas, while his eyes lighted up with admiration at the beauty of the maiden.

"Well, senor?" he said politely, addressing the Spanish officer who confronted him.

"You have rendered us a great service, Senor Skipper, for we would have had hard work to have beaten those pirates back, but for your timely aid," said the major, while Valita stepped forward and said somewhat warmly:

"Give the young gentleman the credit he deserves, Major Rovalez, for but for his coming we would all have been doomed."

CHAPTER III.

INGRATITUDE.

MAJOR ROVALEZ winced under the words of the maiden, but said:

"I mean to give the sailor full credit, Senorita Valita, in the reward he shall receive, for I shall be most liberal in my pay."

"You will give me no gold, Senor Officer! I am no pauper or beggar. I saw your danger from my vessel, and came to help you. I kept your vessel between my boat and the pirates,

so that they did not see us, and thus we were able to surprise them.

"That is all there is of it, senor, and I bid you good-evening."

The major was angry. He felt that he owed his life, and the lives of the others, to the young sailor; but it cut him to the quick that he could not square the debt of gratitude with a little gift of gold.

The young man was no ordinary personage, and he addressed him with the air of one who felt that he was his equal.

"For what you have done for me, senor, I thank you from my heart, in the name of my parents and myself, for fearful indeed would have been our fate but for you. Will you not let me at least know the name of our brave preserver?"

As Valita had spoken, she stepped forward and grasped the hand of the young sailor, whose face flushed crimson, while that of Major Rovalez paled with anger.

"You make too much of what he has done, Senorita Camblas, and, which he has at least the good sense to see is hardly worth pay for," somewhat hotly interrupted the officer.

The young man smiled, but paying no heed to the words of Rovalez, said, addressing Valita, as he stood before her with head uncovered:

"My name is Angelo Rebello, senorita, and I am but a coast trader, yonder craft being my own."

"Permit me to hope that your alarm will not cause either your brother or yourself to suffer any ill effects, and to bid you *adios*!"

He bowed as he spoke, with the courtly air of a chevalier, and was turning to his boat, when Senor Camblas called out:

"Is yonder craft but a common trader, young senor?"

"Yes, senor."

"She sails remarkably well."

"She has never met her superior, senor—not even in your beautiful craft."

"You are but a braggart!" muttered the major.

"It is well, senor, for you, that my pretty Bread Winner was not distanced by your yacht," replied Angelo Rebello, who heard the major's remark.

"Is it customary for trading vessels of the size of yours to carry such a large crew?" sneered the major, who seemed to fairly hate the man who had saved his life, and who had been so kindly spoken to by Valita Camblas.

"Again you are fortunate, Senor Officer, that I have so large a crew."

"You got a proper reply, Major Rovalez that time," Valita remarked with a laugh, that seemed only to increase the anger of the officer, for he said:

"When a craft like yours sails as she does, and carries so large a crew, she can be nothing else than—"

"What, senor?" asked the youth, as the major hesitated.

"A smuggler, or a pirate."

"Senor Officer, but for the presence of ladies, I would punish that insult as it deserves," and again was the young sailor about to depart, when the major stepped before him, his sword raised.

"Hold! I am a Spanish officer, and I demand to know who and what you are, for if that wild looking set of men with you are not pirates, then I am greatly mistaken."

"For shame, Major Rovalez, to insult me who has saved your life but now, and who has just told you that the presence of my mother and myself alone protect you!" and Valita's face flushed with anger, while her large, dreamy eyes flashed.

"Valita, my child, you are rude to the major, who knows his duty," cried the Senor Camblas.

"Yes, my child, go at once into the cabin, and remain there until you come to your senses," commanded the planter in silent tones.

But, Valita Camblas was not one to be silenced, and she responded with spirit:

"I am not rude, mother, nor will I go into the cabin. Major Rovalez has no right to insult one to whom we all owe our lives."

"Senorita, I regret this scene, I assure you, and I will remove at once the cause of the trouble, by bidding you *adios*."

Again did Angelo Rebello start toward his boat; but once more Major Rovalez confronted him, while he hissed:

"Not a step do you move, sir, until you tell me what your vessel is, and why you carry a score of cut-throat pirates on board?"

"Senor Major Rovalez, for I just heard you so called, knowing your name, I am aware that you do hold high rank, and have much to say in the Government of Cuba, so I will tell you frankly that my vessel is a West Indian trader, voyaging from island to island, while these men you see are really pirates, for I rescued them last night, from their vessel which was sinking, and am taking them to a seaport where I am to give them their liberty."

"My own crew is but a small one, but with these men on board I asked them to go to the rescue of this yacht, and they did their work well, as the result has shown."

"Now, stand from my path, Senor Rovalez!"

"I will not, for I declare you a prisoner, and shall put your pirate crew in irons."

"My dear senor, you were unable a while ago to defend your vessel with what force you had, so pray do not expect me either to yield as a prisoner, or to permit these men to do so, for, pirates though they are, I picked them up in distress at sea, and shall not betray them."

"Do you dare disobey me, as an officer of Spain?" shouted Major Rovalez.

"I do, in this matter, Major Rovalez, so stand aside, I say, and permit me to pass."

"Never! I will run you through first."

As the major fairly shouted the words, he sprung toward the mysterious young sailor as though to run him through with his sword.

CHAPTER IV.

THE THREAT.

As the Spanish officer started toward Angelo Rebello with murder in his eye, Valita uttered a cry of alarm and sprung forward, as though to shield the young sailor; but the young skipper still carried the sword which he had used in his attack upon the Lagoon Pirates, and seeing that the Spaniard was in deadly earnest, he raised the weapon quickly, the blades crossed, and, after a few passes Major Rovalez was disarmed.

A most superior swordsman, he was utterly amazed to find his sword sent flying far away, to fall into the sea.

"Senor, I will be more merciful, than you would have been to me," said Rebello, and he moved toward his boat, to find that the dozen men in it, whom he had said were pirates, were now boarding the yacht, while one of them said:

"You had no right to tell them who we were, and we'll settle him, or he'll hang us yet."

"Hold, men! As a shipwrecked crew you were entitled to my protection, and I will carry you, as I promised, to a place of safety. This officer can do you no harm, for he has not the power; so back to your boat!"

"Not until we throw him into the sea, the Spanish dog, to want the noose about our necks, after we had saved his life," cried the ringleader, an evil-faced Portuguese.

"You shall not harm him! Back again into your boat, I command you!"

It was a critical moment, and no one felt it more than did Major Rovalez.

If it was true, as had been said, that the young sailor commanded an honest trading-craft, and had picked the men up at sea, who had followed him to the rescue of the yacht, it was natural to suppose that, when their lives had been threatened by the Spanish officer, Angelo would have no power to check them in their attack upon Rovalez.

The crew of the yacht had suffered too severely in the attack of the Lagoon Pirates to offer any resistance, and the major certainly was powerless, and had placed his strength in the fact that he was a Spanish officer, which he supposed would terrify all outlaws.

He had gone too far, as he saw, and now, the very one whom he had attempted to kill was again his protector!

If the men were really the crew of the young sailor, who might be a pirate—and his having so fleet a craft, and so many men on board, certainly looked suspicious—then he might be able to control them; but the affair had certainly taken a most critical turn, and it was yet to be determined who would prove the master.

The men hesitated at the bold stand of the young skipper, and then looked at their leader, the Portuguese.

He said:

"Senor, we owe you our lives, and we don't wish to go against you. We believe you will take us to a seaport where we will escape in safety; but this fine-feathered peacock flies too high for that fowl, and must come down. We will string him up, and then obey your orders."

"You shall do no such thing, for, as an officer of Spain, he intended only to do his duty, though he went out of his way to do so, under existing circumstances, I admit."

"Back to your boat, men!"

The men looked at each other, and at their leader.

"The Spaniard shall hang, as he threatened us," declared the Portuguese, sullenly.

"Men, as a Cuban, I serve under the flag of Spain, and I will protect one of its officers in need. Do not force me to bloodshed, my man," and the young sailor stepped squarely in front of the Portuguese.

"Do you dare me, youngster?"

"I do, unless you obey me, for I allow no one to dispute where I command," was the bold response.

"I've a mind to toss you into the sea," was the threatening retort, and the man had the ugly look of a wolf in his anger.

"Don't attempt it, but back to your boat!"

The Portuguese pirate whipped out a knife and made a spring upon the young sailor; but, quick as he was, the other was quicker, and drove his sword to the hilt in his body, and, ere the man could fall, Angelo caught and threw him over the low bulwark into the sea with a strength that was marvelous, while he called out to the pirates:

"Now, men, be sensible, and back to the

boat, for that fellow brought on his own death."

The men were a lawless set; but in their very lawlessness yielded to a master. They at once sprung back into their boat, where, without the slightest hesitation or fear of them, Angelo Rebello followed, and took his seat at the tiller, saying in an unmoved voice:

"Give way, men!"

The order was obeyed, and, as the boat moved away from the yacht's side and headed toward the trader, not a cable's length distant, Major Rovalez, unsubdued by the narrow escape he had met with, of death at the hands of the infuriated pirates, called out angrily:

"This day's work shall not be forgotten, you pirate dogs, and I'll yet see you all hanged to the yard-arm of a Spanish frigate!"

A rude laugh from the outlaws greeted this savage threat, and the boat sped swiftly on its way toward the little West Indian trader.

CHAPTER V.

A PLOT OVERHEARD.

THOSE on the yacht watched the rapid departure of the boat; and one at last, Valita, felt an anxiety for the young Cuban sailor, for she feared that his crew might attempt a mutiny.

She was gazing after the receding boat, as it went toward the trader, when the major stepped up to her side.

He was as jealous as a Turk, and his face showed it as he said:

"You seem deeply interested, Senorita Camblas, in that young pirate?"

"I am not so heartless, Major Rovalez, as not to feel an interest in one to whom I owe such a debt of gratitude as I do to Senor Rebello."

"Ah! you remember even his name?"

"Certainly, and a pretty name it is—Angelo Rebello, and it shall often be on my lips, when I say my prayers."

"You would pray for a pirate?"

"If he were a pirate, and did what he has done, yes, for he would be worthy at least of being remembered in our prayers."

"He is a pirate."

"Then why did he rescue us from those we knew were pirates, and not seize the yacht himself? His actions belie your words, Major Rovalez."

The major was angry clear through. He loved the maiden, and was jealous of the slightest glance upon another, and now that he found her interested in one who was, if not a pirate, at least a common seaman, he was both incensed and stung in his Castilian pride, and especially was he now mortified that he owed to Angelo Rebello his life, and had also been so cleverly disarmed by him.

"The fellow is but a common seaman, Senorita Camblas, and if not a pirate, he has outlawed himself by his acts to-day."

"His manners are remarkably courtly for a common seaman, and might well be copied by some courtiers, while his language did not show ignorance, and while his swordsmanship was quite remarkable, his mercy was equally so, as you certainly can bear evidence to, Major Rovalez," and the Senorita Valita smiled sweetly.

The major uttered an oath under his breath, while Senor Camblas and his wife, seeing that their daughter was fretting the officer almost beyond endurance, walked up to them and the former said:

"That is a bold youth, Major Rovalez, but I hope, on account of the service he rendered us, you will overlook his impertinence to you?"

"Yes, Major Rovalez, for we certainly owe much to him, though I admit he deserves punishment for having disarmed you."

The Senora Camblas made an unfortunate mistake, to refer to that act, which, more than all else, humbled the proud Spaniard, as no man yet had proven his superior with a blade, in a sword-crossing bout with him.

"What! would you have had him stand and let Major Rovalez run him through, mother, rather than disarm him when he was skillful enough as a swordsman to do so?" asked Valita.

The major fairly chewed his lips, while the senora said:

"He should not have resisted an officer, my dear, and I hope you will have nothing more to say upon the subject."

"No, for you are but a girl and know nothing about such things," the planter added.

"I have eyes," was the quick response, and Valita used them by again observing the other vessel, which was already under way and heading along the coast as before.

"I shall not overlook the fellow's offense, senor, even though you and the senora ask it, as it would set a bad precedent, and he must be punished, though of course his services will mitigate it, so that it will not be death," and the major gave a wicked smile, for he had the power to make the young sailor suffer, and he meant to do so.

Valita calmly watched the receding craft, paying no heed to his words, and, as the yacht moved on her way once more, she saw that a breeze was springing up which would send the two vessels skimming swiftly along.

"Now we shall see if the strange craft is only a fair-weather vessel," she remarked, as the

yacht, her namesake, heeled well over under the increasing breeze and went bowling along at a ten-knot pace.

A glance at the other craft showed that she stood up far better under the pressure, and when soon after the Valita had to take in her topsails, for her scuppers were under, to leeward, the other, though still gaining on the yacht without extra canvas, set more!

"That is a remarkable craft," declared the planter, who was a good amateur sailor.

"She is a wonder, señor—a wonder, for she carries all of her canvas where we must reef, if the breeze grows stronger," said Nunez Mora, the sailing master of the Valita.

"It then more convinces me that she is not an honest craft," Major Rovalez remarked.

"I will give him his price for the craft, for I can have her wholly refitted, and, with new and larger sails, she would be a marvel," the planter remarked.

"His craft will be confiscated, señor, for that shall be his punishment, for I will see to it, and you can then buy her at a mere song," Major Rovalez remarked, in a low tone.

"Good! I'll be glad to do so, señor, and I will place the money in your hands for the purchase. Why, she fairly flies away from us, in spite of the increasing breeze and sea growing rougher!"

"I must have her, Major Rovalez, I must have that craft!" cried the planter, with enthusiasm.

"I will see to it that you do, Señor Camblas," responded the major, in a low voice.

But, Valita had heard the plot, and the look that crossed her beautiful face showed that she meant to counterplot to thwart them.

CHAPTER VI.

A VILLA EDEN.

It was noon of the following day when the Valita ran into the harbor of Havana and dropped anchor.

The little trader had dropped her almost hull down by the time night had come on, and when darkness settled upon the sea, she was seen no more from the deck of the yacht.

The next morning other sails were visible, but the trader was not among them.

Upon the Valita there was not a happy feeling as had been the case before the discovery of the other craft.

Then all was calm enjoyment; but the coming of Angelo Rebello had left a cloud that would not pass away.

Major Rovalez tried to make himself agreeable, the planter told stories, and the senora laughed, but still all was not as before.

Valita was quiet, thoughtful, and inclined to be sarcastic.

The yacht dashed swiftly along, and the Cuban planter would have been in ecstasies at her splendid behavior, but for the fact that he had seen a common coast trader far her superior in speed and stanchness.

"I will have that craft," he had said, and to accomplish that end, he and Major Rovalez had decided upon a plan as they sat on deck late at night smoking their cigars and sipping their wine.

"We will find her in port when we get there, and then I will act," the major had said.

But the major did not prove a good prophet in this case, for they did not find the trader in the harbor.

Every vessel was scanned closely for her; but among the hundreds there, and some of them pretty coasters, too, the one they sought was not there.

"I knew that he was a pirate.

"I might have known he would not dare enter port," said Major Rovalez.

With this the anchor was let fall and the party went on shore.

Major Rovalez was driven to his handsome bachelor quarters in town, while the planter and his wife and daughter drove out to their country villa a league distant from the city.

It was a superb home, well befitting one who owned a dozen plantations and a thousand slaves, as did Señor Marez Camblas, who was one of the wealthiest men in Cuba, and prided himself upon it.

Situated upon an eminence, surrounded by terraces of flowers, with a valley on one side, a forest on the other, and an extensive view in any direction, Villa Eden was a home in which happiness certainly should ever dwell.

The villa was very large, built in the shape of a castle, with a grand tower on one wing, a plaza in the center and fountains to cool the atmosphere upon every hand, while the perfume of flowers floated constantly upon the air.

There were hammocks scattered about, inviting to a siesta, shady nooks, rustic retreats and any number of attractions and luxuries.

Slaves, in their snow-white attire were ready to do the slightest bidding, and all who visited at Villa Eden were wont to say that it had been thus appropriately named, for it was indeed an Eden of beauty.

An only child, as she was, it was no wonder that Valita, beautiful and accomplished beyond her years, had scores of suitors.

Señor Camblas, a great lover of the sea, had

had built for him the yacht Valita, and she was upon her trial trip around the island of Cuba, with only Major Rovalez as a guest, when she is presented to the reader at a time when all on board would have been taken by the Lagoon Pirates, but for the pluck of Angelo Rebello.

Before she had left the yacht, Valita had found an opportunity for a few words with the young sailing-master, Nunez Mora, and she had appeared to be conversing with him in a very confidential tone, which, had the major or her parents seen, would have aroused the jealousy of the one and the ire of the other.

Nunez Mora was a Spaniard, and it was said that he had once been in the navy of Spain, but having left, for some reason, had become a mate on board a Cuban coaster, and thus came to get the berth upon the yacht as sailing-master, through the agents of the planter in town.

He had shown himself a thorough sailor, and all that he could do for the pleasure of the cruise he had done, so that the planter, his wife and Valita were most pleased with him.

As for the major, he had not spoken a dozen words to him on the trip, and appeared yet to watch him very closely from some reason.

In the attack upon the yacht, by the Pirates of the Lagoon, Nunez Mora had shown himself possessed of pluck and good fighting qualities.

The news of the attack upon the yacht by the Lagoon Pirates at once spread through the city, and visits of congratulation began to flow in steadily from the friends and acquaintances of the planter and his wife.

But for some reason the rumor got about that the lagoon pirates had been beaten off by Major Rovalez and the crew of the Valita, no mention being made of the coming to the rescue of Angelo Rebello.

Those who talked with Valita, however, got a very truthful statement of the affair, overhearing which, her father said, with more anger than was his wont in addressing her:

"My child, simply thank the Holy Mother for your safety, and let Major Rovalez and myself tell of the manner in which we beat off the pirates, as you know nothing about such things."

The face of Valita flushed at the reproof, and she said in reply:

"I know enough, father, to feel that but for the arrival of that young skipper and his men, our doom would have been sealed."

The planter muttered something about "measuring tongues with a woman," and walked off to see Señor Nunez Mora, who a servant told him wished to speak with him.

The guests just then departed, and Valita was seized with a sudden desire to take a stroll in the park.

Calling her maid, a pretty quadroon, and getting her sunshade, she walked down the gravel drive and, reaching the grand gateway leading into the villa grounds, sat down upon a rustic bench as though to await the coming of some one.

She had not waited very long before a horseman was seen approaching, and Fidela, the maid, said quickly:

"It is the Señor Mora, senorita."

"Yes, and now I will learn what he has to tell, for I feel assured that he came to see me," was the answer of Valita.

CHAPTER VII.

SPRINGING THE TRAP.

As Nunez Mora turned out of the gateway, leading to Villa Eden, he discovered Señorita Valita and her maid and rode toward the spot where they were in the woodland.

Dismounting, he raised his hat politely and said:

"Señorita, I had written a note to get into your hand in some way; but your remark, as you passed your father and myself, led me to think I would see you here, so I can tell you what I have to say."

"And what is there to tell, Señor Mora?" asked Valita, with considerable interest.

"The trader returned this morning, senorita."

"Ah! and with what result?"

"She ran in past the yacht, and dropped anchor a few cables' length beyond."

"And her commander?"

"I saw on her decks the brave youth who rescued us, and his crew only; those who came with him, and who he said were pirates whom he had rescued from a wreck at sea, not being with him."

"Perhaps they were in the hold, out of sight, or the cabin, for you remember we did not see them on the deck of the vessel, while coming with her?"

"If they were on board, senorita, they were evidently well hidden, for a Government barge boarded her, soon after her arrival, and—"

"I expected it! I feared it!"

"But proceed, Señor Mora."

"The young captain was taken off, in irons, and his crew kept under guard, for the barge left an officer and his men on board."

"And the prisoner was taken alone?"

"Yes, senorita."

"To El Moro, of course?"

"Yes, the barge landed at the water stairs of the castle, senorita."

"When was this, Señor Mora?"

"Three hours ago, Señorita Camblas, for I made an excuse to visit your father about certain changes in the yacht's rig, that I might obey your request and report at once to you."

"You are kind, Señor Mora, and I wish you to do more for me."

"I am wholly at your service, senorita."

"It is a most ungenerous, ungrateful act upon the part of Major Rovalez to arrest this young man, and in my father to permit it, for if he insisted that it should not be done, the major would yield, I feel assured."

"I do not believe the young man an outlaw, and were he, his act should cause his forgiveness for crimes committed."

"But I wish to know the truth, and I ask you to find out all that you can for me about him. It may require gold, and hard work; but I feel that you can accomplish it, and this purse will supply you with what funds you will need."

The face of the Spaniard flushed, and he said:

"I will do all in my power, senorita, for I wish to see the young man free, be he pirate or not. If I have to use gold to do so, I will call upon you, for I am not rich myself."

"Be prepared now, Señor Mora, for you might be unable to see me or get word to me when you needed gold. So take this purse, and if you have aught to communicate, write me a note and leave it just here."

And Valita indicated a hiding-place for the missive.

"I will obey, senorita."

"And Fidela will come here morning, noon and evening of each day, for, Señor Mora, I will not allow that young man to suffer punishment if I can prevent it, and I will not betray you in the matter, I assure you."

"It is very kind of you, senorita, and I appreciate it, while I will do all I can to inform you just what has been done or may be done in the matter."

And so saying, Nunez Mora mounted his horse and rode away.

The next morning, when Fidela sought the spot where any communication was to be left, she found a note.

She carried it quickly to her young mistress, who, opening it, read:

"The young sailor has been placed in a dungeon in the Moro Castle."

"I will be at the same place of meeting at sunset to-day, when I hope to have important news to communicate."

There was no address, nor name signed, which showed that Nunez Mora was at least cautious.

All day Valita was anxious for time to fly, that she might learn what her spy had to communicate.

She had become deeply interested in the young Cuban sailor, and, in fact, thought more of him than she cared even to admit to herself.

He was certainly most gentlemanly in bearing, there was nothing of the ordinary sailor about him, and his pluck had been most thoroughly tried.

Señor Camblas and his wife, Valita well knew, had looked over all of the best offers made for her hand, and both had decided upon the Spanish officer, Major Rovalez.

He was of patrician blood, was said to be very rich, and certainly had great influence both in Spain with his sovereign and in Cuba with the captain-general.

He was looked upon as a rising man, and many hinted that when Captain-General Don Quixote Buriel should retire, it was more than likely that Major Ramel Rovalez would step into his shoes.

Señor Camblas was a shrewd man, and had an eye to steadily increasing his riches, and, with a son-in-law high in authority, he would have power and chances not otherwise thrown in his way.

He was a Cuban, as was his wife, and had the antipathy that many of those of his race had toward Spaniards.

But one like Major Rovalez was an exception, and so he had received the offer of the distinguished officer for the hand of his daughter with great consideration, and had at once given Valita to understand that she was to become the Señora Rovalez after she had passed her seventeenth year.

In love with no one, accustomed to obey, and considering that it was the right thing for her parents to select her future husband for her, Valita had acquiesced quietly, for she rather liked the gallant major, whom all other maidens were most anxious to insnare.

So matters stood at the time of the attack on the yacht by the Pirates of the Lagoon.

But Valita had a warm heart and a proud spirit, and she was not one to submit to wrong against the gallant young sailor who had risked life to save those in the yacht, and not willing to cause greater jealousy on the part of Major Rovalez, and arouse the ire of her parents, by openly espousing the cause of the youth, she determined to act secretly in the matter, and play a bold game to thwart the acts of others, if she had to do so, and which bold game will before long be made known.

It was therefore with deep interest in what she might learn, that Valita called Fidela to accompany her to the meeting-place with Senor Mora, that afternoon at sunset.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE MAJOR'S PLOT.

THE Spanish sailing-master of the yacht, put in an appearance, very soon after Valita and Fidela arrived at the place of rendezvous.

"I hope you will pardon my asking you to meet me, Senorita Camblas, but I felt that I could not write what I have to say," said the sailor.

"I gladly pardon you, senor: but what have you to communicate?"

"I discovered, senorita, that the *goleta* is a coast, or island trader, by name the Bread Winner, and her owner and master is the young sailor who came to our rescue so daringly.

"He dwells on the north coast near Cardenas, and there lives his mother.

"This I found out from a man who had once sailed with him.

"He has four seamen and a negro servant in crew, and is an honest trader."

"And yet he has been seized?"

"Yes, senorita, he was seized, as I told you, immediately upon his entering port, and a guard is now upon his vessel, while he lies in a dungeon of the castle."

"And his fate?"

"He is to be executed, as far as I can learn the facts, senorita, as a pirate."

The face of Valita Camblas turned pale, and her eyes flashed fire, while she said:

"How gained you this information of infamy, Senor Mora?"

"From a page at the captain-general's Palacio, senorita, whom I visited to ascertain what he could for me, of the fate of the young sailor."

"You did well, Senor Mora."

"Pray tell me all that the page discovered."

"He overheard a conversation, senorita, between the governor of the castle, Major Rovalez and the captain-general, and it seems that the matter was to be kept secret from the public, the *goleta* was to be sold and the young skipper executed as a pirate.

"This, begging your pardon, senorita, was at the request of Major Rovalez, who said that he had proof of the guilt of young Rebello, and the captain-general gave orders to the governor of the castle to execute the prisoner secretly, in three days, while the major had instructions to send the crew of the *goleta* to the castle, for imprisonment, and to sell the vessel and turn the money received for her into the Government treasury."

"Senor Mora, you have done well, and I shall not forget your kindness.

"I am interested in this young man, from the fact, that because he befriended us, and humiliated Major Rovalez, he is to be treated as an outlaw.

"It shall not be, for, if I cannot help him in one way, I will in another, and I may call upon you again for your aid.

"Again I thank you, senor, and must ask you to come here once each day, in case I should wish to communicate with you," and Valita held forth her little hand, which the Spaniard warmly grasped, but with a mark of deepest respect.

Then the maiden and Fidela hastened back to the villa, Valita plotting in her mind, as she went along what she should do to save the daring young sailor from the ignominious death which was to be visited upon him through the jealous hatred of Major Rovalez.

Hardly had she gained her room, when Fidela, who had gone to the kitchen on some errand, hastened into the chamber, and said, excitedly:

"Senorita, Major Rovalez has just arrived, and he told the Senor Master that he had news to tell him about the *goleta*, and they have gone to the library, and here is the key of the stair door, which I ran and locked and took out, so if you go there and slide back the panel under the *portiere*, you can hear all they say."

"Fidela, I do not like the idea of being an eavesdropper."

"Yes, senorita, but you might find out something the Senor Mora did not know about the young senor."

"True; and as it is a case of life and death, I will go."

So saying, she gathered her skirts about her, and slipped softly down the stairs leading into a vestibule connecting with her father's library, where he always took his guests who came upon important business.

There was a panel in the door, and through this Valita could hear every word said within the room.

The door being locked by the cunning quaroon, Valita would have ample time to escape, should any one come to the door, and the only other approach was from the upper floor, where Fidela was doing guard duty, to call her young mistress should her mother come to her rooms to seek her.

The two occupants of the room, the planter and his guest, had just taken their seats, when Valita reached the outside of the door and turned the panel softly.

A *portiere* hung over the door from within the library, so that she knew she would be effectually concealed, and the movement of the panel hidden from view.

The panel had been placed in the door for a circulation of air, when the planter did not care for too much of a breeze through the room, and the artful Fidela had discovered its use as a point of observation, or for eavesdropping purposes, having doubtless taken advantage of it herself on former occasions, for the negress was excellently well informed as to matters in the Camblas household.

"Well, senor, as I told you, I have good news for you," was what Valita heard the major say, as he lighted a cigar and threw himself into an easy-chair.

"I am always glad to hear good news, Major Rovalez, I assure you," was the planter's response, and Valita knew that her father was seated in his favorite place by the window.

Her face flushed with shame, at the thought of what she was doing; but then she remembered the life of a brave young man was at stake, and she remained.

"You will get your yacht, senor."

"The trader?"

"Yes, senor."

"At what price?"

"Name your price, Senor Camblas, as I have her for sale, and the price goes to the Government."

"I'll give three thousand pesos for her as she is."

"You need give but one thousand, senor, for, as I said, there will be no competition."

This was a strong card with the major, to save the planter two thousand pesos, and he knew it.

"I will hand you an order on my agents for the sum, major, before you leave."

"But how did you arrange it?"

"I convinced the captain-general that the young master of the *goleta* was a pirate, and he, when questioned as to what he had done with the men on his vessel, said that he had run them to Key West and there landed them."

"This proved that he was trying to play honest, though carrying a pirate crew, and doubtless committing piracies when at sea."

"The captain-general then sent for the governor of the castle, and ordered him to execute the prisoner, and also commanded me to send the crew of the *goleta* to prison, where they will be kept for several years, and their fate will not be known, you see."

"I had orders also to sell the *goleta*, and turn the money into the treasury, and the captain-general will affix his seal to the orders tomorrow afternoon, and immediately after I will send your yacht's sailing-master on board the trader, with a crew of four men, and order him to any point to refit that you may desire to send the craft—though I would suggest Baltimore in the United States."

"When she returns, no one will know her."

"That is so, Major Rovalez, but it is hard that this young sailor should turn out so bad."

"Yes, very hard, senor."

"You told the captain-general that he had saved us from the Lagoon Pirates?"

"Yes, Senor Camblas, but suggested that he did it simply to cover up his own acts as a pirate."

"Perhaps so; but I hate to have him put to death."

As the planter spoke, Valita heard Fidela call her, and hastened away, while she said firmly:

"He shall not die, for he is not guilty—he is no pirate!"

CHAPTER IX.

HOPE.

SEATED in a cell of the grim old stone fortress and prison, whose walls have hidden more misery than any like spot on earth, was Angelo Rebello, the young master of the *goleta*.

The cell was a dismal, loathsome place, and where only the most desperate prisoners were wont to be confined.

But the spirit of the brave youth was unbroken, and though chains bound him to the floor, he had not lost hope or courage.

Presently the iron door of his cell was thrown back and a keeper appeared, lantern in hand, for the gloom there, though it was bright sunlight without, was such that one unaccustomed to the darkness could not see distinctly.

"A lady to see you, prisoner," said the keeper.

"A lady to see me?" was the surprised query, and the young man rose, his chains clanking dismally as he did so.

"Yes."

"Alas! can my mother have heard that I am here?"

"I know not who she is, prisoner; but she bears the permit of the captain-general to see you, and she awaits a few paces off."

"I will see her, of course."

"Advance, lady," said the guard.

"I would see the prisoner alone, senor," said a low voice.

"I must remain, lady."

"Remain within sight, but not near."

"Here."

The prisoner knew that the guard had received a liberal fee, and the next moment a veiled lady appeared in the doorway.

The lantern revealed that she was dressed in black, and that her face was securely veiled so that it would not be recognized.

"Senor Rebello, I will unvail, but pray do not speak my name aloud, for my coming is unknown, except to two other persons."

"The senorita—"

But Rebello checked himself, and added:

"And you have come to see me, sweet lady?"

"Yes."

"In this loathsome place?"

"Why not? for being here you need aid."

"Alas! I cannot get succor here, and I was told but this morning to prepare for death."

"So I have heard."

"Indeed! I supposed that Spanish officials kept their dark deeds a secret."

"The fact of your arrest and imprisonment reached my ears, it matters not how."

"I think from your kindness in trying to find out, senorita."

"We will not discuss that, Senor Rebello, for I have little time to remain, and I wish to ask you some questions."

"Certainly, senorita."

"You will answer them in all truth and honesty?"

"Upon my honor, senorita."

"What is your real name?"

"Angelo Rebello."

"You are a Cuban?"

"I am."

"Your calling?"

"A sailor."

"Your home?"

"Near Cardenas."

"Who dwells there?"

"My mother and sister; and senorita, my sister is almost as lovely as you are, and that is saying much."

Valita blushed at the compliment, but continued:

"Did you ever commit one lawless act?"

"With a noble mother to guide me right, senorita, how could I be the wretch these Spaniards accuse me of being?"

"Your vessel is a legitimate trader, then?"

"Yes, senorita, I have never done one act that I am ashamed of."

"And those pirates upon your vessel the day you saved the yacht?"

"I took them from a wreck at sea, as I told you, senorita."

"And what became of them?"

"After the threat of the Spanish major, I ran to Key West and landed them."

"And then?"

"Came here with my cargo."

"And then?"

"I was seized and brought here, senorita, from which place I am to be led forth and shot, I am told."

"Senor Rebello, I believe every word that you have uttered, and I shall do all in my power to save you."

"Good bless you, senorita, for though I cling to life, as is natural, yet I dread more the sorrow that must fall on those I love, than I do death, and bitter indeed will be the blow upon my mother and sister."

"I will do all in my power, senor, and though I am but a young girl, working against a man that has great power, I will, I hope, meet with success."

"I went to the captain-general and asked him for a permit to visit a prisoner."

"Who that prisoner was I did not tell him, but he granted the request, and so I am here."

"I shall now try one plan to save you, and if not successful, I will try another, so I beg of you to have hope."

"Ah, senorita, your presence here has given me hope, for I feel that I am not deserted."

Bidding the prisoner farewell, Valita Camblas then called the guard and left the dismal tier of dungeons, giving a fervent prayer of thanks when she was again in the open air.

"Now to see Major Rovalez," she muttered, and she entered the hired *volante*, in which another closely-veiled female form sat, and bade the driver to go at once to the abode of the Spanish officer.

CHAPTER X.

DESPAIR.

"COME with me here," said Valita to her veiled companion, as she descended from the *volante* and was ushered into the official reception-room of the Spanish major; for, as a public officer he was wont to receive visits from all kinds of people, and the going there of the maiden attracted no marked attention.

There were others present, quite a number in waiting; but Valita had no time to wait, for she was nervous about being away from home so long.

She had gone off for an extended drive from the villa, left it at the house of a friend, and there she and her companion had put on heavy veils, and sallying forth, had sprung into a public carriage and driven to the Palacio, where

Valita had made herself known to the captain-general and been granted a pass to visit the prisoner in the Castle El Moro.

"Ask Major Rovalez if he will see me now?" said Valita to the pompous military attendant.

"A dozen await the senior's pleasure now, and you must take your turn," was the reply.

"I cannot."

"I know my duty, and you must await your turn," was the sullen reply.

Valita hesitated an instant, and then said:

"Here, take this ring to Major Rovalez, and say that the wearer wishes to see him at once."

The soldier started, for the ring was a superb diamond solitaire, but accompanying it was a golden *onza*, evidently not intended for the major's pocket, but the attendant's.

He seemed to so understand it, for Valita and her companion were ushered into an antechamber, while the soldier went on with the ring.

"The bearer of this, senior, wishes to see you at once."

Major Rovalez was taking his ease in smoking-cap, dressing-gown and slippers, reading a paper, while many on urgent business waited without, believing him deeply engaged in the affairs of State.

"Caramba! is the lady here, you say?"

"Yes, senior."

"Did you recognize her Fonda?"

"No, senior, she is most deeply veiled and came in a hired *volante*."

"Ask her to come in at once."

The soldier disappeared, while Major Rovalez muttered:

"What on earth has brought her here?"

A moment after Valita and her companion were ushered into the luxurious parlor of the Spaniard.

He bowed low, while he said:

"This is an honor I scarcely expected from the Senorita Valita Camblas."

"It is an honor that you never would have received Major Rovalez, but for the fact of your treachery," was the cutting reply.

The Spaniard's face flushed, while he asked with some anger:

"May I ask what the Senorita Camblas has reference to?"

"The fact that you have thrown into prison and condemned to death as a pirate, a man without a trial, and to whom you owe your life, senior."

"Ah! the senorita's father then has told her that the young master of the *goleta* was proven a pirate?"

"My father has told me nothing, nor have I spoken to him upon the subject, but on the contrary I must ask you, Senior Rovalez, as a gentleman, not to speak of my visit here."

"Your wish shall be respected, senorita, and I hope your companion may be as silent upon the subject as myself," and the officer glanced toward the one who had accompanied Valita, as a seeming reminder that he had not been presented to her.

"My companion is as true as steel, senior, and having received your promise to keep my secret, I will now ask you for your proof regarding the guilt of this young man?"

"I cannot give it to you, senorita; but he is guilty and as such must suffer."

"For what he did to serve us, that day, I would have been glad to have saved him, had he been willing to turn his crew over to me."

"But he has hidden them away, and now he must abide the consequences."

"Which will be to have his vessel sold, and you, for my father, become the purchaser?"

The Spaniard started at this.

Valita seemed strangely well informed upon the subject.

"Your father took a fancy to the craft, as she outsailed his yacht, and as she will be sold, he will purchase."

"And the crew?"

"Will have to go to prison for awhile."

"And the master?"

"Is in prison now."

"Will that alone be his punishment?"

"He will be set free soon."

"Major Rovalez, he will be set free by Death, for he is now under sentence to die, as you well know."

The face of Ramel Rovalez paled.

The maiden's information amazed him.

"I cannot betray state secrets, senorita."

"It is a state secret, as you call it, of your own making, Major Rovalez, and I ask you to undo the wrong you have done."

"A man who lives by piracy must take the consequences, senorita."

"This young man is no pirate, but an honest trader, living with his mother and sister, when he is not voyaging."

"His crew consists of four Cubans and a negro slave, and no more, for those whom he had with him that day, and who nobly came to our rescue, were pirates, and were picked up by him at sea from a wreck, two nights before."

"You seem strangely well informed, senorita, about this handsome young pirate," sneered the Spaniard.

"I am, and shall be more so, if he is murdered under false charges."

Again the Spaniard started, while Valita continued earnestly:

"You can save this young man, senior, and I beg you to do so."

"I cannot."

"Does that mean that you will not?"

"I will not interfere, Senorita Valita."

"I believe you have done me the honor of asking for my hand from my father?"

"I have, senorita."

"You gained his consent?"

"I did."

"You have not yet gained mine?"

"I shall hope to, senorita."

"Do you consider it, my hand, senior, a prize worth striving for?"

"I certainly do, a most valuable prize."

"It is, in a financial standpoint," was the cutting response; but she quickly added:

"If it is, Senior Rovalez, your desire to win my love with my hand, you can never do so if you refuse to give this young sailor his pardon."

"Why your deep interest in this man, senorita?"

"Because I understand well the deep debt of gratitude that I owe to him, and believe him guiltless of all crime."

"Will you set him free, Major Rovalez?"

"I cannot."

"You will see him die?"

"I can do nothing to save him."

"You refuse?"

"Unfortunately I must do so, Senorita Camblas."

"Adios Major Rovalez," and rising quickly Valita left the room, her veiled companion by her side.

"One moment, senorita."

"Well senior," and Valita turned at the door.

"If I save him do you pledge me your hand, in accordance with your father's wishes?"

An instant of silence, and she answered:

"If you save him, yes," and she went on her way, while from her lips came the words:

"Oh Fidela! I am in despair."

"Yes, senorita, for Major Rovalez will pretend to save him, but not do so."

"He fears the young senior, and wishes him to die," returned Fidela, who was the mysterious veiled companion of Valita.

CHAPTER XI.

FIDELA'S PLOT.

"SENORITA."

"Well, Fidela?"

They had just left the abode of Major Rovalez, and were on their way to the place where the Camblas carriage had been left.

"If the senior saves the young sailor, he will surely claim your hand!"

"Yes, Fidela, I am doomed to be his wife, it seems."

"If he does not save him, senorita?"

"My father will sacrifice me anyhow."

"You do not love him?"

"No."

"I know that, senorita, and you ought not to marry a man you do not like," said Fidela, who was a companion to her young mistress, as well as her slave.

Fidela was a very shrewd young girl, for she was only about twenty, and she had been purchased by Senor Camblas especially at the request of Valita, who drove by the slave mart one day, when some negroes were being sold.

Valita saw Fidela and cried out:

"Oh, father! buy that pretty quadroon girl for me."

The planter yielded, and thus had Fidela, entered the household of the Camblas where otherwise she would have gone to some plantation to work in the fields.

From that day Fidela idolized her young mistress, and knowing how to read and write, and with wit and intelligence, she was an invaluable servant.

"I did suppose I loved Major Rovalez, Fidela, until of late, but I never thought much about it, and now I am sure I almost hate him."

"Serves him right, senorita, but if he saves the young senior, and you have promised to marry him, you will do so, to keep your word."

"But if he don't save him, and you don't wish to marry him, then maybe your father would not force you to do so."

"You are a good reasoner, Fidela; but I would be willing to marry him, if he would only not let that young man, be executed as a pirate."

"Why don't you save him, senorita?"

"What can I do now, Fidela?"

"Go to the captain-general."

"Ah!"

"Tell him the truth, and ask him to send and find out about the young senior, and then for your sake to spare him."

"Fidela, I will do as you suggest!"

"Yes, I will go at once," and the driver was told to drive to the Palacio of the captain-general.

That dignitary, who held such mighty power over Cuban subjects of Spain, was enjoying his ease in his luxurious quarters, when the name of Senorita Camblas was brought in to him.

The captain-general was a great admirer of

the planter's daughter, and often dined in the Camblas villa, for Senor Camblas had gotten upon the good side of the Cuban ruler by letting him into certain money-making speculations.

He had before received a visit from Valita that morning, and had allowed her to see Angelo Rebello, telling her that he would keep her secret, and wondering why she wished to see a prisoner in the castle.

He now at once had her admitted to his presence, Fidela, veiled so that she could not be recognized accompanying the maiden.

"Senor General, I have come again to tax your kindness," said Valita, as she entered the room, and the captain-general advanced in a courtly way to welcome her.

"How can I serve you this time, my dear Senorita Camblas?" and he gazed with admiration upon the beautiful face of the Cuban girl, for she had thrown back her veil, and also bowed to Fidela, who returned it gracefully, though Valita made no presentation.

"Captain-general, I have come to ask you to bear with me in patience, while I tell you a little story, and I trust to your humanity and honor to do what is right."

"I mean not to err with intent, senorita, when I do so, and I will gladly hear what you have to say," and he led her to a seat.

Then she told the story of the voyage in the yacht, their being overhauled, and closely beaten in the race with the trader, the attack of the pirates and the rescue by Angelo Rebello.

Even the scene between Major Rovalez and the young sailor she made known, and then of what he had told her about himself in the castle that morning.

In conclusion, she said:

"Now, Senior-General, you have it in your power to send to Cardenas and investigate the story of the young man, and prove if he is the outlaw that he is accused of being."

"If you believe him to be innocent, I feel that you will set him free."

"I certainly shall not allow an innocent man to die as a pirate, senorita, and I am glad to hear your story."

"Rovalez told me of the affair, pretty much as you have done so; but he seemed to feel that the man was a pirate, and so I made no inquiries, but ordered his day set for execution."

"I have not yet signed the order, nor will I do so until I am convinced of the innocence or guilt of the prisoner."

"Oh, Senior General, I thank you, for I cannot think of one who so nobly served us dying for crimes which I feel he is not guilty of."

"I will never forget your kindness, Senior General," and with a glad heart Valita took her leave, saying to her faithful maid, as they entered the carriage:

"Fidela, your plot has worked well, and I more than thank you."

An hour after, Valita was at home, looking as innocent as though she had not just been successful in a deep plot to save the life of a fellow-being.

Hardly had she left the presence of the captain-general, when he ordered a young officer sent for.

"Captain Concha, I wish you to start at once in my armed yacht for Cardenas, and learn all you can regarding the person whose name is written on this card."

"Let your investigations be secret, and get at the exact truth."

"I will at once do your bidding, Eccellenza," replied the officer, who was a young man of handsome presence and with a face that was most attractive.

He was dressed in the handsome uniform of a staff-officer and was one of the military attaches of the captain-general.

Summoning another officer, the captain-general said to him:

"Go at once to the Castle El Moro, Senor Garcia, and say to the governor that I desire the prisoner, Angelo Rebello, sent to the Palacio to-night, and under mask, so that his face be not seen by curious eyes."

The officer departed, and Don Quixote Buriel muttered:

"I will do all I can for the fair Senorita Camblas, for I do not believe that she loves Rovalez, and if not, I believe I will enter the list of her suitors, if I am old enough to be her father."

CHAPTER XII.

SEEING THROUGH A MILLSTONE.

TAKEN from the castle in a closed vehicle, Angelo Rebello was driven to the private entrance of the Palacio, and ushered into the presence of the captain-general, attended by a sergeant and two soldiers.

He was heavily ironed, and yet stepped with an air of undaunted courage, as he crossed the threshold of the room where Don Quixote sat.

The Governor of the "Gem of the Antilles" looked up as the prisoner entered, and fixed his penetrating eyes upon him.

If he expected to see the youth afraid, he was mistaken.

Instead, Angelo Rebello bowed with courtly dignity, and met the gaze fixed upon him.

"Aha! I think I see now the interest of the senorita in this pirate.

"He is as handsome as an Apollo," muttered the captain-general.

Then he ordered the sergeant to await outside with his guards, and turning to the prisoner, said:

"Advance nearer, please."

With clanking chains Angelo Rebello obeyed, and stood confronting the Governor of Cuba.

"You are Angelo Rebello?" and Don Quixote Buriel glanced at a slip of paper he held in his hand.

"I am, Senor Eccellenza," was the reply, and the voice was rich-toned and deep in sound.

"You calling?"

"An humble master of an island trading craft, Eccellenza."

"Your voyages are always legitimate?"

"Yes, Eccellenza, for though poor I profess to be honest and a gentleman."

"Where do you live?"

"Mostly upon the sea, Senor Eccellenza; but my home is near Cardenas upon the coast."

"And who dwells there with you?"

"My mother, sister, and several slaves."

"What cargo brought you into port?"

"Fruits, Senor Eccellenza."

"From what port?"

"The coast plantations, Eccellenza."

"You claim to have picked up a pirate crew at sea, some days ago?"

"Yes, Eccellenza, I sighted a wreck, one morning following the severe storm of last week, and bore down upon it.

"I saw that the wreck would soon go down, and those on board, fifteen in number, had no boats or means of escape.

"I recognized the wreck, from her figure-head, which was a red head of Mephisto, as the buccaneer craft known as the Devil of the Sea, and told the men that I knew them, and would save them, carrying them to some safe port in safety, if they would pledge me their words to give up piracy.

"They did so, and I took them on board, with a quantity of booty they had stored in the cabin.

"I made them go into the hold, leaving the hatches open, as I did not care to excite suspicion by having so many men on board, if seen by a passing vessel, or from the shore."

"And then?"

"The next afternoon I sighted a yacht running out of Matanzas, and tried the speed of my little *goleta* with her, overhauling her rapidly.

"As I was passing, two boat-loads of Lagoon Pirates darted out upon the yacht, which was nearer inshore than I was, and I saw her danger, so called upon the pirates I had rescued to aid me.

"They did so, and we boarded the yacht and kept off the lagoon outlaws."

"And then?"

"I was called back to the yacht, to be paid a reward, which I refused, for I am not one to wish pay for a service thus rendered.

"My refusal angered the officer who was a guest on board, and accusing me of piracy, because I told him who my men were, and that I would not surrender them, as I had picked them up in distress, he attacked me, and I disarmed him."

"What, you disarmed Major Rovalez?"

"Yes, senor."

"You, a Cuban sailor, a swordsman?"

"My father taught me the use of a blade, Senor Eccellenza."

"And then?"

"My men, or rather those I had rescued, wished to attack the officer, but I urged them from doing so, and returned to my vessel."

"How did you urge them?"

"I was compelled, Eccellenza, to kill their leader."

"Ah!"

"Yes, Eccellenza."

"Well?"

"I feared to bring the men into port, for I wished to keep faith with them, so I ran for Key West and landed them.

"Their booty was too bulky to take with them, and, as they seemed well supplied with gold, they bade me keep it.

"I had already made out an inventory of it, to report to the port commandante, when I was arrested."

"You have told a very straight story, young senor, and it has the ring of truth.

"Where is this inventory of the pirate's booty?"

"In my cabin, I left it, senor, in the *goleta's* log."

"Did you log your cruise just as you have told it to me?"

"Yes, Eccellenza."

"And your log?"

"Is on my *goleta*, Eccellenza."

The captain-general rung a bell, and an orderly appeared.

"Send Lieutenant Garcia to me."

Then, as the orderly departed, he turned to Angelo Rebello, and asked:

"Did no one take your part on the *goleta* when Major Rovalez attacked you?"

"The Senorita Cambas, as I learn it was, seemed to believe my story, Eccellenza."

"Ah!" and the one word expressed more than Angelo Rebello understood.

Lieutenant Garcia then came into the room, and the governor said:

"Go on board of the *goleta* Bread Winner, now under guard, and bring the vessel's log at once to me."

The officer bowed and retired, and his Eccellenza said:

"Now, senor, you must return to your cell in the castle; but I give you no hope of mercy at my hands."

"I ask for no mercy, Eccellenza, for to do so implies a crime, and I have been guilty of no wrong."

"Well said," muttered the governor, as he called the guards, and told the sergeant to take the prisoner back to his cell in the Castle El Moro.

With the same courtly grace as when he entered, Angelo Rebello bowed and marched off with his guards, while Don Quixote mused to himself after his departure:

"I think I can see through a millstone when there is a hole in it.

"That gallant Major Rovalez has allowed his mad jealousy to run off with his reason.

"The girl took up for the handsome sailor, and that angered Rovalez, who was then disarmed by the youth, and so got revengeful.

"I think I shall save Rovalez from making a sad mistake; but I don't blame him for wanting that handsome fellow out of the way, for he's just the fellow to captivate a woman, and he stood before me with all the dignity of a judge who was trying a criminal.

"Well, we'll see what the *goleta's* log says."

The officer sent for the log soon returned to report that it had been taken by Major Rovalez along with other papers.

"Go and fetch that log from Major Rovalez at once, and if he is not at his rooms, go in and find it," said the governor, who was getting very earnest in his endeavor to get at the facts of the case.

In half an hour the officer returned.

He had the *goleta's* log, and stated that he had taken it in the absence of the major, as commanded.

The governor glanced at the log, reading in a low tone here and there, as he came across extracts that struck him, and then picked up a loose paper, upon which was written in a bold, fine hand, a list of various articles.

After some time spent in looking over the log and papers the governor sat musing deeply until a visitor was announced.

It was Major Ramel Rovalez, and he evidently did not know his rooms had been invaded by the orders of the captain-general during his absence, and the log of the Bread Winner taken therefrom.

CHAPTER XIII.

GUIDED BY DESTINY.

A FAIR wind wafted the yacht of the captain-general on its way until within a league of Cardenas, and then dying out left it becalmed.

Anxious to fulfill his mission with all dispatch, Captain Cristobal Concha ordered a coxswain and two oarsmen into the gig, intending to row on into the port that night, and let the yacht follow when the wind rose.

He was creeping along the shores, near the town, when suddenly a cry was heard.

It was a woman's voice and in distress without a doubt.

Instantly the men ceased rowing, and all was as silent as the grave.

As the boat drifted along with the tide, the ears of its occupants strained to catch the slightest sound, there came a low call in a man's voice.

Then the sound of oars reached their ears, and out around a point shot a boat.

In it were four oarsmen and in the stern sat a man at the tiller.

The back of the oarsmen being toward the gig, they did not see it, nor suspect its presence there, and the man at the tiller seemed to be too much occupied just then to look ahead.

Suddenly came the low command in Spanish: "You drop your oars, Pedro, and help me gag and tie the girl, for she will revive and shriek like a sea-bird."

The words were distinctly heard by those in the gig, and at once came the low order from Captain Concha:

"They are kidnappers!"

"Lay alongside of that boat, coxswain!"

The boat was almost upon the gig, and still not seen, and the next moment there came a crash, and loud rung out the commander:

"Surrender, or you die!"

The kidnappers were taken wholly by surprise; but a glance showed them that they were five to four, and their leader answered the demand with a shot.

Instantly he fell overboard, shot by the young Spanish captain, who boldly leaped into the large boat and laid about him with his sword.

The coxswain and two men followed, and a fierce combat, hand to hand in the boat followed.

"Upset the boat and drown the devils," shouted a kidnapper, at the same time grasping in his arms the form of a woman either dead or in a swoon.

The order was promptly obeyed and all were hurled into the water, still fighting desperately.

But the young captain had sprung forward as the boat capsized and grasped hold of the form held by the kidnapper, at the same time driving his sword into the man's body.

As he withdrew it he saw that the one he held was reviving under the cold bath, and he made a few strokes and gained the boat.

By an effort of his great strength he placed the woman in the boat and swam to aid his men, two of whom were struggling with three of the kidnappers."

But the latter, seeing him coming, and having beheld their comrades die under his attack, shook themselves loose from their foes and dove deep.

"Let them go, men, and make for the boat! Where is the coxswain?" he asked.

"Dead, Senor Captain."

"Poor fellow; but he died in a good cause and two went to keep him company. Can I aid you?"

One of the men was a poor swimmer and accepted the offer of the gallant officer, and they all swam for the boat, which the tide had carried off some distance.

But suddenly a form arose in the boat, seized the oars, and a voice called out:

"I will come to you, my brave friends."

"Just in time," said the captain, as he grasped the gunwale, for one of the men was helpless and the other fast failing in strength, while he, weighted down by his clothes, boots and weapons, was feeling the strain upon him.

"Better late than never, senors," came the response, and the speaker bent over and aided the tired-out man into the boat.

Then a like service was rendered the other, with the aid of the captain, who also accepted a proffered hand, while he said gallantly:

"You have saved our lives, senorita, for we were about used up."

"And from what have you not saved me, senor, for those men stole me from my home a few minutes ago, and I lost all power of resistance, though I heard and saw all, so know of your brave rescue.

"My home is yonder, so will you not come there and get dry clothing?"

"I will accept your offer, senorita, as soon as we have picked up yonder boat, while, as for the three men I hope they will drown, though I fear no such good fortune will befall them."

The boat of the kidnappers was then picked up, the officer cursing, as his men were utterly prostrated, and under the direction of the one whom he had rescued, Captain Concha pulled for the shore.

At the landing they were met by a lady and three negroes, and the former said, as she sprung forward:

"Ah, senor, I saw your brave rescue, and something told me that you would bring my child back to me.

"But come and accept the hospitality of our little home, for most heartily are you welcome."

Cristobal Concha readily assented to the visitation, for he saw that his men were not yet able to row on to the town, and he aided one of them in the walk up to the house.

It was a pretty house, surrounded with a few acres of land, and with grounds running down to the water's edge.

The negroes, an old man and woman, and a young girl, hustled about to do the bidding of their mistress, and the sailors said they would soon come round with rest.

"I can give you all some dry clothing, belonging to my son, who is fortunately well supplied," said the lady, as she bade the officer and his men enter the house.

But Cristobal Concha said thoughtfully:

"Oh, no, we will sit out here, thank you, senor, as we are dripping wet, and we will row back to the vessel as soon as my men are rested."

"Your vessel is near then, senor?"

"Yes, becalmed half a league away, where I left her to row on to the town, and happy am I that I did so now."

"Thank Heaven that you did, senor, for the captors of my child were Lagoon Pirates."

"We were seated here, Bonita and myself, when suddenly the men rushed out of the shrubbery there and seized my child, bearing her at once to the shore and their boat."

"Bonita gave one cry, and I was so paralyzed with terror I could not move."

"But at last I regained my faculties, and calling my servants, ran along the shore just in time to witness your bold attack upon the pirates."

"You are sure they were Lagoon Pirates, senora?"

"Ah, yes, for one of them I recognized, as he seized my child, as a man who had once served on my son's *goleta*, and tried to seize the vessel one night, but had been thwarted by Angelo's

courage, who wounded one of the men, the others making their escape to the shore.

"The man who was wounded confessed before he died that they were Lagoon Pirates, and told Angelo to beware of the man who had escaped, as he would seek revenge.

"To-night he sought it by carrying off Bonita."

"And but for you, senior, my fate would have been a sad one.

"But here are refreshments," and Bonita poured out a glass of wine and handed it to her rescuer, who said:

"May I ask the name of the fair lady I have been so fortunate to serve, and introduce myself as Cristobal Concha, a Captain of Spanish Horse, and at present aide to the captain-general?"

"My name is Bonita Rebello, senior, and your name will never be forgotten by me," was the simple remark, and Cristobal Concha started as he heard the name, while he thought:

"Bonita Rebello, and she spoke of her son as Angelo.

"He is the son I came here to inquire about.
"How strangely does Destiny sometimes guide our footsteps!"

CHAPTER XIV.

THE SPANISH OFFICER'S REPORT.

"WELL, Captain Concha, what report have you to make?"

The words were addressed by the captain-general to his young and handsome aide, just four days after the latter had received orders to go to Cardenas and look up the record of Angelo Rebello.

Captain Cristobal Concha was a favorite with the captain-general.

He told a good story, was a good singer, and, better than all, was a splendid soldier.

His father and the governor had been old comrades together in the wars, and Don Quixote made of Cristobal a confidential aide in many things, and was wont to say in a joking way to others:

"The boy is rich, but if I never marry and have a son of my own, I will make him my heir."

In answer to the question of Don Quixote, the young officer replied:

"I have a very strange report to make, Senior Eccellenza."

"Indeed?"

"Yes, Eccellenza, for I discovered all that you would know, and more, too."

The governor was interested, and showed it in his face, for the manner of his aide told him that something out of the usual course of events had occurred.

"I had a good wind, Eccellenza, until I got within sight of the lights of Cardenas, and then there came up a dead calm.

"I started to port in the gig, with a coxswain and two men, and a kind Destiny seemed to guide me, for I came upon a scene in which I was able to render good service."

Then Cristobal Concha told of the kidnapping of Bonita Rebello, his rescue, the killing of two of the Lagoon Pirates and supposed escape of the others by swimming, and the loss of his coxswain, who had been found the next day and buried.

"Just like you, Concha, just like you, and you have told your story as modestly as did that young sailor whom Major Rovalez swears is a pirate.

"I'll be bound when I get at the facts that you killed both of the pirates."

The aide laughed, and said:

"What would you say, Senior Eccellenza, if I told you that the home to which I was taken and so hospitably treated, was that of the youth whose record you sent me to find out?"

"What! Can this be possible, Senior Concha?"

"It was so, Eccellenza."

"And the maiden?"

"Was Seniorita Bonita Rebello."

"The sister of the young pirate?"

"Yes, senior."

"If she is half as pretty as her brother is handsome, I'll warrant that you lost your heart."

"I almost believe I did, senior."

"Then I am to expect no unprejudiced opinion from you, Cristobal?"

"Ah, yes, Eccellenza, were I ten times in love I would faithfully do my duty."

"I believe you, senior; but now to what you found out!"

The aide simply told his story of discoveries, which was that the family of Rebello had once been in affluent circumstances, but had become comparatively poor, and the youth had taken upon himself the support of his mother and sister.

Senior Rebello had two old negroes, and their two children, one of whom, a man of twenty-five, sailed on the *goleta* with his young master, and his sister was the ward of Bonita.

The Rebello owned their home and the *goleta*, and that was all of their worldly possessions; but the little vessel brought them in a good living.

"You have done well, Senior Concha, and I shall now give to you the pleasant task of going to the castle and ordering the instant release of this young sailor and his crew, and here is the log of his vessel which you can carry with you to give to him.

"If the pirate booty he had on board of his vessel has been removed, find it, have it sold and the amount turned over to him as prize money under the Government seal as directed, while, if his cargo of fruit is destroyed, or has been sold, see that the entire worth of it is given him.

"Having done this, I suppose you would like to return in the *goleta* to Cardenas, to see that he reaches there in safety?" and Don Quixote smiled.

"Truth, Senior Eccellenza, I would obey an order to do so with great readiness, for the seniorita is as beautiful as an angel."

"Ah! you have been hard hit, I see; but is she as lovely as the Seniorita Valita Cambias?"

"Yes, Eccellenza, equally so, but her hair is auburn and her eyes intensely black."

"You were half in love with the Seniorita Cambias, I believe?"

"Altogether in love with her, Eccellenza; but I felt that Rovalez was my successful rival, so did not press my suit!"

"By the way, when you have attended to the orders given you, drop in and say to Rovalez I wish to see him to-night at dinner, to join some friends, and I will expect you also; but not a word to him about this young pirate."

"No, Senior Eccellenza."

And with a glad heart at the chance to set the mother of Bonita Rebello free, Cristobal Concha left the Palacio and made his way to the gloomy Castle El Moro.

Little expecting release from a Spanish dungeon, over the door of which should be written:

"Who entereth here
Leaves Hope behind,"

Angelo Rebello sat in his gloomy cell. The darkness had come for the sun was setting, and the keepers were here and there lighting a lamp in the gloomy corridors.

Soon there came the sound of persons approaching, and then the iron door was swung open, and the prisoner shaded his eyes to guard them from the rays of the lantern that flashed upon him.

"You are Senior Angelo Rebello?" said a deep voice, yet not unkindly were the words spoken.

"I am Angelo Rebello, senior."

"Come with me."

"I am chained to my cell, senior."

"Ah! knock off those chains, keeper."

It was quickly done, and the young sailor arose and followed the one who had given him the order to do so, and seeing that he walked with difficulty after his being so long in chains, he supported him with his arm, while he said:

"A little exercise will soon give you the use of your limbs, Senior Rebello."

Angelo Rebello was surprised.

Could this be a Spanish officer thus kind to him, he wondered, and yet he saw that he was in the full uniform of a captain of horse.

Gaining the reception room a few questions were asked the prisoner, by the officer in charge, regarding the crew of his vessel, and then, after a short wait, to the surprise of Angelo, he saw his *goleta's* crew brought in under guard.

"There is a *volante* for them; you come with me, Senior Angelo," said Captain Concha, and the next moment they were seated in a vehicle and dashing out of the huge stone pile down toward the city.

Glancing back Rebello saw that the vehicle in which were his crew, were closely following, and the two drew up at the pier off which lay the Bread Winner.

A boat awaited them, and soon after Angelo Rebello was on his own deck, his crew by his side, while the guard in charge were entering the barge alongside as though to leave.

Following the captain into the cabin, Angelo Rebello said in a voice of deep feeling:

"Senior Captain, I feel that I am free, and for your kindness to me accept my warmest gratitude."

"Senior Rebello, it has been my pleasure to serve you, in the little I have done, and when you return home, present the compliments of Cristobal Concha to your mother and sister, for I have had the pleasure of meeting them."

Angelo looked surprised, but the captain continued:

"That you are free, I will betray a little confidence, and tell you that you owe it to the Seniorita Cambias, who stated to the captain-general your case as it was, and but for her you would ere this have been hanged as a pirate."

"Here is a draft, Senior Rebello, for the pirate booty on board your vessel, which was sold by order of the captain-general, as a prize cargo for your benefit, and your freight was also disposed of and here is pay for it, while a Government cargo is at the wharf which is to be transported to Cardenas."

"Now I will bid you *adios*, Senior Rebello, with congratulations upon your escape, and the

hope that when you again visit this port you will call upon me."

Angelo Rebello had never flinched while under sentence of death, and his fearless bearing had won the admiration of his guards; but now his heart was deeply touched, and he dared not trust himself to speak, so he could only wring the hand of the young Spaniard in parting; and thus they parted, Cristobal Concha well knowing how deep was the emotion felt by the brave young Cuban.

CHAPTER XV.

PUNISHED.

DON QUIXOTE was fond of pleasant company, and it was often that he invited friends to dine with him.

The army and navy officers and their families were honored frequently, and so were the aristocratic and wealthy Cubans, with invitations to the Palacio for a pleasant little dinner.

On the evening of the release of the young commander of the Bread Winner and his crew, the guests invited consisted only of Senior Cambias, the Cuban planter, his wife and daughter, with Major Rovalez and Captain Cristobal Concha.

Valita had accepted the invitation most readily, for she was anxious to know if the captain-general had any news to give her regarding the Cuban prisoner.

Though very young, Valita was a reigning belle in society, and few would believe her to be under nineteen, for there was so much of the self-possessed woman about her, and it was said that she had already broken more hearts than any other beauty in Havana.

Still she was not spoilt, and, fond of society, treated all of her admirers alike.

The planter was never late in keeping an engagement, and arrived at the very minute when he was expected, and the governor gave them a most cordial greeting.

A moment after, Captain Concha arrived, so that Valita had no opportunity to speak to the governor upon the subject that was worrying her, and, Major Rovalez coming in, they all adjourned to the dining *salon*.

"What is the matter, Rovalez, for you look distraught?" said the governor, when the dinner was being served.

All had noticed that Major Rovalez was not his usual self, and Valita had set down the cause as being her visit to him a few days before.

Thus appealed to by the governor, Major Rovalez said:

"The fact is, Senior Eccellenza, I am out of sorts, for my valet, whom I had every reason to trust, has mysteriously disappeared."

"Indeed?"

"When was this?"

"Some days ago, Eccellenza."

"You cannot account for his disappearance?"

"No, senior."

"Did he rob you?"

"Well, there were some little things missing, but nothing that would serve him in value."

"Have you gone to the commandante of the city guards about him?"

"Yes, Eccellenza, but without learning anything of him."

The conversation then turned upon other subjects, and after awhile the governor remarked casually:

"You had quite an adventure, Senior Cambias, during your cruise on your new yacht?"

"Yes, Excellenza, and one that but for the courage of our guest, Major Rovalez, would have proven fatal."

The major bowed, and the Senior Cambias remarked:

"Yes, we have much to thank Major Rovalez for."

"Without wishing to detract from Major Rovalez's gallantry, for he fought most bravely, and Eccellenza, I would say that we have most to thank a young Cuban sailor, who came to our rescue," said Valita.

The Senior Cambias and the senora tried to frown Valita down, but the governor came quickly to her rescue with:

"Yes, I heard of the gallantry of that young Cuban, for you told me something of it Rovalez, only you had the idea that he was himself a pirate."

"As he was, Senior Eccellenza, and is so proven and condemned," somewhat warmly said Rovalez.

"So was believed, major, and as such condemned; but I investigated the record of the young sailor, and I must say that I was so much pleased with the report brought me, that I ordered the Senior Angelo Rebello and his crew at once released, and they are now on board their vessel."

The face of Rovalez grew as black as a thunder-cloud, while Valita's brightened up with joy.

As for the Senior and Senora Cambias, they did not know what to say, and Captain Cristobal Concha's face showed no emotion whatever, as he quietly sipped his wine; but his eyes were opened as to why the governor had given that select little dinner-party.

"He wished to punish Rovalez in a mild way," thought Captain Concha.

"I supposed you considered my word sufficient proof, Eccellenza, for the guilt of the young Cuban?" said Major Rovalez.

"Your word, Senor Rovalez, I consider as good as gold, but it came to me in a mysterious way that you might be mistaken, and I sent Captain Concha in my yacht down to Cardenas to hunt up the record of Senor Rebello, and I was more than satisfied with what was discovered, and at once released the young sailor.

"The truth is the log of the *goleta* reports the picking up of thirteen pirates from the wreck of the buccaneer craft known as the Devil of the Sea."

"The log?" gasped Rovalez, turning pale.

"Yes, senor, and it furthermore reports that the men were sent into the hold to avoid suspicion from passing vessels, who might see so large a crew upon the *goleta*."

"Again it states that certain booty was taken from the wreck and placed in the hold of the *goleta*, and gives an account of the race with Senor Camblas's yacht, and a modest report of the attack on the pirates by the shipwrecked crew, under Senor Rebello himself.

"In regard to what followed, the log speaks briefly, saying merely that a reward was offered for services rendered, and indignantly refused, which angered a Spanish officer, whom he, Rebello, was forced to disarm.

"Next it reports the landing at Key West of the shipwrecked pirates, their giving their booty—too bulky for them to carry—to him, Rebello, and his making an inventory of it, intending to turn it over to the port commandant, with a statement of how it was obtained.

"Upon these facts I had the booty sold to-day, gave the money to the young Cuban, along with the price of his cargo of fruit, which was spoiled, and sent out as freight on his *goleta* a lot of supplies for Cardenas, and I suppose ere this the gallant young sailor is at sea."

The governor seemed to take malicious pleasure in telling what he had done, so Captain Concha and Valita thought, for they saw that he often glanced at the pale face of Major Rovalez, who seemed almost crushed under the blow, and not once dared look toward the maiden to meet her triumphant smile.

Having felt that he had punished the major sufficiently, the governor changed the subject and became most entertaining.

But Rovalez was silent, and as soon as he could pleaded indisposition and retired.

Springing into his waiting *volante* he was driven rapidly homeward, and entering his rooms was met, not by his new valet, but the one who had disappeared so mysteriously a few days before.

"What! you back again, Pindar?"

"Where have you been, and what does your absence mean?"

The face of the major was stern, and the valet, having seen him in a temper, fairly trembled as he said in an excited manner:

"Oh, senor! do not blame me, for I was seized at the door, by masked men and carried off to prison, I know not where, for I was blindfolded. I was well treated for the time I was there, yet the one who attended on me was masked.

"An hour ago, senor, I was again blindfolded, placed in a carriage and left at your door."

"This is a remarkable story, sirrah."

"Why took you with you the book on my desk and the papers with it?"

"Oh, senor! I did not touch anything."

"*Maldito!* there is the book now."

"Yes, it is the *goleta's* log, yes, and that inventory," cried Major Rovalez, as his eyes fell upon the articles named lying upon his desk.

For a moment he stood like one gone dazed.

Then he said to himself:

"The captain-general has done this."

"Yes, he had Pindar kidnapped, the log taken, for he told me of its contents, and the inventory of those piratical goods, which I hoped to get a few thousands out of.

"He suspected me and some one has turned his suspicion upon me.

"Who can it be?"

"*Maldito!* it is either Valita or Captain Concha."

"Well, I must be careful, for in spite of my power behind the throne, he can send me back to Spain, and that would ruin me.

"I must indeed be careful, but I shall find out who my foe is and woe be unto whoever he may be.

"And that Cuban dog Rebello?"

"He shall yet be put out of the way, for if not he may steal that girl from me, and I vow she shall be my wife."

CHAPTER XVI.

THE CONFESSION.

"I THANK you, oh, so much, Eccellenza," said Valita, in bidding *adios* to the governor, at leaving the Palacio after the dinner, and the ruler of Cuba pressed her little hand and was repaid for what he had done.

On the way home neither the senor, his wife or Valita spoke.

The maiden lay back among the carriage

cushions, as though asleep, and the thoughts of the planter were busy.

When Valita had retired, Senor Camblas said:

"Well, Inez, I fear that Rovalez made a mistake."

"In what respect?" tartly asked the senora, though she knew full well what her husband meant.

"He should have been more lenient with that young sailor, after what he did for us, even though he had been a pirate."

"What Rovalez did was to win favor with you, and also on account of his getting jealous because Valita was kind to the young man."

"Rovalez wanted to be the hero, and failed; but had not the manliness to admit that he owed his life to the Cuban sailor, and sought to destroy him and again was foiled."

"You seem to be suddenly against the major?"

"No, I am angry with him for making a jealous fool of himself."

"If he had acted differently, why Valita would have liked him the more; but as it is, I believe she thwarted him."

"Who?"

"Valita."

"Our child?"

"Who else do I mean?"

"How could she thwart him?"

"She's a woman."

"She's but a child."

"She may be in years, but she has an old head on her young shoulders, and she read Major Rovalez thoroughly."

"She saw who was the hero, and was determined the major should not sacrifice him, and you get his vessel for a song."

"But how could she?"

"Through the governor."

"Wife, are you mad?"

"No."

"You talk like one who is insane."

"I tell you I am no fool, Marez Camblas, and I saw to-day that the governor and Valita understood each other."

"I'm a woman, and I saw that Valita and the governor understood all about what was going on, and the major was punished for what he had done by what Don Quixote said before us."

"Mark my words, if I do not speak the truth."

The planter was excited, and rung the bell furiously.

"Ask the Senorita Valita to come here," he said to the servant who answered the summons.

In a few moments Valita appeared, looking very beautiful in her dressing-robe, and with her long hair, which Fidela had been combing, hanging far down her back.

"Valita!"

"Yes, father."

"What do you know about this pardon of that young pirate by the governor?"

"If you refer to Senor Angelo Rebello, father, he was no pirate."

"He was so accused."

"And falsely, the governor said."

"What do you know about it?"

"What do you wish to know?"

"Why was he pardoned?"

"Because he was innocent."

"Who found him so?"

"I did all in my power to do so."

"You?"

"Yes, father."

"When?"

"The other day, Senor Father."

"How?"

"I told what I knew to be the truth, and had you done so, father, when you knew that Major Rovalez was trying to hang Senor Rebello, I would not have had to go to the Palacio."

"You went there?"

"Yes."

"Alone?"

"No, father, Fidela accompanied me."

"Oh, my child!"

"I told you so," said the senora, with exultation.

"How you found it out, I do not know; but as it is known, I will say frankly, I would have felt like a murderess had I allowed that man to die, when I felt that I could have saved him."

"I will also confess that I went to the quarters of Major Rovalez and sent in the ring which you bade me accept from him."

"It gained me an immediate audience, and Fidela was with me deeply veiled and wearing one of my dresses, and it worried the major half out of his wits to discover who she was, but he did not," and Valita laughed.

"This is no laughing matter, child," sternly said the planter.

"It is now, father, when all has come out well."

"But why did you visit Rovalez?"

"I asked him to save that youth."

"And his answer?"

"He promised to do all in his power, if I would give the promise that you had to him."

"And that was?"

"To become his wife."

"And what said you?"

"Oh, I promised; but I concluded to save the

Senor Rebello myself, and thus be under no personal pledge to Major Rovalez, and thus it was I went to the governor.

"Is there aught else you wish to know, father?"

"No! go to bed!"

The planter spoke sternly, but Valita walked over and kissed her father, then her mother, while she said:

"You'll sleep better, father, to-night, when you feel that you do not own a yacht whose master was hanged."

Then she glided from the room.

For a moment neither the planter or his wife spoke; but when they heard her door close they looked at each other and burst out laughing.

"The girl has my pluck," said the planter.

"Say rather your cunning, for she outwitted us all; but she possesses my indomitable spirit."

"She does, I admit," meekly said Senor Camblas.

"She is like you, and Rovalez will catch a Tartar."

"Do you think she will marry him now?"

"She must, for with a son-in-law the captain-general, and mark my word, Rovalez will follow Don Quixote, then I can treble my present fortune."

"She must marry the future Eccellenza of Cuba, wife."

"I hope she will, but I doubt it."

"Why should you?"

"She is romantic."

"What has that got to do with it?"

"That young sailor saved her from a fearful fate."

"Granted."

"She saved him from being hanged for piracy."

"Ah!"

"Look out or the future Governor of Cuba will have a dangerous rival in the young sailor."

"*Maldito!* I wish the fellow had been hanged."

"But he was not."

"Maybe he is a pirate after all," said the planter, and his tone was significant, as though the wish was father to the thought.

"Don't try and prove him so, Senor Camblas."

"Why?"

"Because Valita will prove him to be a saint."

The planter started, while a look came into his eyes that boded no good to Angelo Rebello.

"I shall watch him closely," he said.

"And I shall see what can be done in another direction."

"What?"

"The direction of the Palacio."

"What do you mean?"

"You wish to marry Valita off to the future Governor of the Gem of the Antilles?"

"Yes."

"A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush."

"I do not understand you."

"Don Quixote is under fifty, distinguished, unmarried, rich, all-powerful, so I prefer the present governor for a son-in-law."

"*Maldito!* you are indeed a woman, and a cunning one, Inez."

"The girl does take after you."

"And I take after the present governor."

"*Buenas noches, amigo,*" and with a laugh the senora left her husband to discuss his decanter of Madeira alone, and ponder over what he had heard.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE RETURN HOME.

THE Bread Winner quickly got up anchor, after the departure of Captain Concha, and ran up to the Government wharf, where a cargo awaited her.

The crew, delighted with their escape from the gloomy walls of the Castle El Moro, and anxious to get out from under its shadow, worked like beavers, and while the governor was entertaining his small party of guests up at the Palacio, the fleet little craft was sailing out of the harbor of Havana under a full press of canvas.

It was the afternoon of the next day, when the Senora Rebello and her daughter were seated in the shade of their little home, that the latter sighted the sail of the *goleta*.

Quickly she was upon her feet, and her cry fairly startled her mother:

"There comes the Bread Winner!"

The mother also recognized the little vessel, and she said with a quiver of joy in her voice:

"Yes, we will soon welcome Angelo, and I hope he will be able to remain in port some days with us."

"I hope so sincerely, mother, for we have much to tell him, have we not?"

"Indeed we have, and of late he has been able to be so little with us."

The Senora Rebello was a woman of fine appearance.

That she was a Cuban, her dark complexion and jet-black eyes and hair plainly showed.

Her form was graceful, and she was but little over two-score years, only a few silver threads yet showing themselves in her black hair.

Born in luxury she had been a great belle in

her maidenhood, but, refusing the offers of rich young planters, she had become the wife of an American naval officer.

He was poor, and soon after her marriage with him, Senora Rebello's father swamped his fortune in speculation.

Leaving the service of America the young naval officer had settled in Cuba, and an humble home upon the southern coast had been their dwelling-place, until the American's death, the story of which will soon be made known.

The little that the senora had left enabled her to go to New Orleans, where her children were educated up to the eighteenth year of her son Angelo, who was three years the senior of his sister, Bonita.

An aunt of the Senora Rebello dying, left to her the little home near Cardenas and a small sum of money, with a family of four slaves.

So the senora returned with her children to Cuba, and feeling that he could do something for the support of his mother and sister, Angelo went as mate on a coaster, then rose to be master, and a year before the opening of this story became the owner and skipper of the Bread Winner, which had been built for him from a model of his own making.

When at the little home, Captain Cristobal Concha had not told the mother and sister of Angelo's being under a death sentence.

He hoped that the governor would break the sentence, when he was convinced that it was unjust, and so he would not worry those who loved the young Cuban unnecessarily.

He had returned to his vessel that night, and she had run in early the next morning with the daybreak breeze, and had anchored off the town.

Then in his most resplendent uniform he had called at the house to see, as he said, if the Senorita Bonita had suffered from the shock of her adventure the night before.

The body of the coxswain had been washed ashore and was buried with honors from those on the armed yacht, while the dead pirates were turned over to the town officials with a report of the affair, and an order from the aide of the Captain-General that the patrol boats should extend their cruising at night as far as the house of the Senora Rebello.

With a promise to visit them again, and having found out to his own satisfaction, from inquiries made in the town, and of the mother and sister, that Angelo Rebello was falsely accused, Captain Concha set sail for Havana, thoroughly convinced of the fact that he had left his heart behind him with beautiful Bonita Rebello.

It had been some weeks since Angelo had last been at home, and when his vessel had been sighted coming in, the mother and sister were overjoyed, and Bonita went down to the shore, to run up to the town in her own light skiff to bring her brother back home, as was her wont, when he visited port, for after seeing to his vessel, he was glad to get away.

The *goleta* swept on her way up toward the town, while Angelo waved a salute to his sister, following in the wake of the Bread Winner, and half an hour after welcomed her on board.

Bono, the negro servant of Angelo was to get some purchases in the town, and then follow in the *goleta's* boat, for he also had kindred to welcome him, his old parents and sister, and leaving his vessel under the care of his mate, as one of the crew of four Cubans was called, the young sailor started for home with his sister.

"Why, brother, how pale and badly you look. Have you been ill?" asked Bonita, as they sailed along in the little skiff.

"No, Bonita, but I have had a very hard time of it, as I supposed you knew."

"Why, what has happened, brother?"

"Has no word reached you of the seizure of my vessel?"

"Not a word," said the surprised maiden.

"Then I will tell you all when we reach the house, and mother can hear too."

"But, Bonita, where did you know Captain Cristobal Concha, for I never heard you speak of him, and he sent his kindest remembrances to both you and mother."

Bonita's face flushed, and she asked quickly:

"When did you see him?"

"Last night."

"In Havana?"

"Yes."

"Did you not know that he had been here?"

"No, indeed; but why?"

"He did not tell you?"

"Not a word."

"Well, he is a remarkably modest man, as regards his own acts, I must say, for, brother, I owe to Captain Concha my life, nay, more than life, for he saved me from the Lagoon Pirates, who had kidnapped me from home."

It was now Angelo's time to be surprised, but just then the skiff reached the shore and springing out he was welcomed home with a warmth that showed that he was his mother's idol.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A SHADOW OF THE PAST.

WHEN Angelo, his mother and sister were seated in their home, they certainly were a most striking-looking trio.

The Senora Rebello and her son have been described; but Bonita has not been fully so, and a word regarding her will not be out of place.

Her form was the perfection of feminine beauty and grace, and her complexion, olive in tint, was yet rich in color, while her eyes were black, in strange contrast to her wealth of red-gold hair.

Every feature of her face was full of expression, and her noble nature was stamped upon her countenance indelibly.

She looked just what she was, a beautiful being, to love and be loved.

"Mother, Bonita has told me that you have not heard of my strange adventures, and I will make them known to you; but first I must hear of this kidnapping deed of the Lagoon Pirates, for I am most anxious to know all," said Angelo.

"The man whom you had on board your vessel, some time ago, and who tried to seize her, but was prevented by you, was the leader, my son."

"You mean the man we called Mexico, because he came from Vera Cruz?"

"Yes."

"He was, as I afterward learned, a Lagoon Pirate, and shipped simply to capture the *goleta*."

"So he was the one?" and the eyes flashed ominously.

"Yes; you remember he swore to be avenged upon you, and his attempt to carry Bonita off was the way he sought to carry out his revenge."

"I shall not forget him."

"Oh! he's dead, for Captain Concha killed him," said Bonita.

"Captain Concha killed him?"

"Yes, brother," answered Bonita, and she went on to tell of her adventure with the pirates, and the gallant rescue by Captain Cristobal Concha, the aide of the captain-general, who had come to Cardenas on some special official duty.

"And not a word of this did the splendid fellow say to me."

"Now I understand why he sent his kind remembrance to you and mother; but he did not tell me to what an extent I was indebted to him."

"And now let me tell you of what has happened to me, since I saw you; and Captain Concha also figures in that, as you will see, causing me to owe to him another debt of gratitude."

Then, in his calm, yet impressive manner, which was natural to him, Angelo Rebello told his story, from his picking up the pirate crew at sea from off the wreck of their vessel, to his release from the castle by Captain Cristobal Concha.

He painted his own acts in no glaring colors, nor did he treat harshly the conduct of Major Ramel Rovalez.

He simply told the truth as the scenes had transpired, though he did dwell with more earnestness upon the beauty of Valita Camblas and her noble conduct in coming to the prison cell to see him.

That he owed his release to her he did not doubt, and yet Cristobal Concha had done much to gain his pardon, he felt assured.

The senora listened to the story of her son with deepest attention, until he came to speak of the yacht of Senor Marez Camblas.

Then she started, her face paled and she leant back in her chair, closing her eyes.

Angelo noticed her attitude, and beheld tears coursing out from beneath the eyelids and rolling steadily down across her cheeks.

He saw that her lips were set, her face almost stern, and yet he made no comment.

When he had concluded his story, the Senora Rebello, with an effort, regained her composure, for she had been most deeply moved, and in a low voice she said:

"And you think that you owe your release from death to the daughter of Marez Camblas, the planter?"

"Ah yes, mother, for I was already sentenced to be hanged as a pirate, and Major Ramel Rovalez was determined that I should be."

"What was the cause of this Spanish officer's hounding you down, my son?"

"I do not know, mother, unless he was angry because the beautiful Senorita Camblas took my part."

"And the Senor Marez Camblas, did he also take your part?"

"He had little to say, mother, for it seemed to me the major had him under his thumb."

"Ah! and the Senora Camblas?"

"She too had little to say."

"And yet their brave daughter defended you?"

"Most nobly, mother, and to her I owe my escape from being hanged as a pirate."

"You have had a remarkable escape, my son, and God bless the Senorita Camblas I say most fervently; but I also pray that she may never cross your path again."

Angelo, and Bonita also, looked surprised, for their mother had spoken more vehemently than was her wont.

But she offered no explanation of her words, and soon after sought her room, strangely depressed by what she had heard, it seemed.

Bono soon after arrived, and received a hearty greeting from his parents and sister, and Angelo and Bonita, as they sat upon the piazza, heard the colored cook of the Bread Winner telling his adventures to his attentive listeners, and by no means sticking to the truth in his recital, for he was heard to say that he had killed three of the Lagoon Pirates with his own hand, when they attacked the yacht, when the fact was that he was safely on board the *goleta* during the fight.

"Brother, your story seems to impress mother most deeply," said Bonita.

"Yes, more than I could possibly believe, Nita; but do you know she spoke of Senor Camblas as though she had known him?"

"Yes, and I believe that she does."

"It was his name that caused her to start, and then to weep."

"Well, we will not try to solve any secret of the past which mother may have; though I am sure that she is deeply pained over something in the bygone which my reference to Senor Camblas recalled."

"I am sure of it; but the Holy Mother be praised, brother, that, after our strange adventures, both you and I are safe," and kissing her brother good-night, Bonita retired to her own room, for it was creeping on toward midnight.

CHAPTER XIX.

A LOOK INTO THE BYGONE.

BACK over a score of years, the scene shifts.

A large ship is riding out a fearful tempest, which has played sad havoc with her rig.

But stout hearts are on board of her, and if no new danger comes she will ride out the storm without further damage.

But suddenly a new danger does come, for the black clouds overhead are rent in twain by a vivid sheet of flame, a fiery serpent descends and strikes the mast, and the crash of thunder that follows is appalling.

A moment of silence, a lull, and then cries of wild alarm arise from half a hundred throats.

And no wonder, for the lightning's stroke has set the noble ship on fire.

The waves run mountain high, the wind howls like gloating demons over the destruction they have wrought, and the ship rolls and pitches wildly in the mad waters.

Before all was darkness; now a red glare rests upon the sea, for fiery serpents run about the rigging, and all know that the good ship is doomed.

And her crew also are doomed, it seems, for the boats have been washed away, and upon a burning vessel, in such a storm, what hope have they?

Out of her cabin pour a score of passengers.

Their faces are white with the fear of an appalling death, and men, women and children huddle together in mad despair.

Some prayers are said in earnest voices, a few loud cries to God for mercy break from some lips, while others utter oaths at the doom awaiting them.

"Oh, father! is there no hope?"

The one who uttered the words was a young girl.

She spoke in Spanish, and her looks indicated that she was a Cuban.

She was very beautiful, even in her despair.

The one she addressed was a man with iron-gray hair and mustache, a face that was calm in the midst of that fearful danger.

He held the maiden close to him, and said in response:

"I fear we must die, Jophine, so meet death with a prayer on your lips and without fear."

These were noble words, and fell like a calm upon the heart of the maiden.

Just then a young man approached them.

His face was blanched, his whole manner indicated fright, his teeth fairly chattered as he spoke.

Yet he was a man of fine appearance, and one would deem him possessed of courage to meet death bravely, come in what shape it might.

"Senor Rebello, there is no hope. We all must die!"

He almost shrieked the words, and then winced under the calm response of the maiden:

"Senor Camblas, a brave man should face death without fear."

"See my father's courage; it has calmed my dread of our fate."

"But is there no hope, Senor Rebello? Can nothing be done?" said the young Cuban.

"You are more of a sailor than I am, Senor Camblas, and should know if aught can be done."

"I will ask the captain."

Away he bounded, to soon return, almost tottering with the weakness of fear that was upon him.

"There is no hope! we are doomed!"

So he said, and he turned away to hide his face, for the flames in the rigging made all as light as day.

Suddenly, out over the wild waters was seen a red glare.

Then came the deep boom of a cannon.

A wild shout went up from the crew, who recognized in it a ray of hope.

Again came the red flash, and once more the boom of a gun.

"There is hope, my brave girl, for I saw by yonder flash a vessel-of-war coming this way.

"She fires to bid us hope, so do not yet despair!"

At his words a fervently uttered prayer fell from Jophine Rebello's lips, while the young Cuban, Senor Marez Camblas fairly lost control of himself in his wild joy.

Nearer and nearer came the succoring vessel, while fiercer and fiercer blew the flames, driving the crowd upon the decks of the burning vessel toward the stern, where crew and passengers were huddled together.

The vessel had been lying to, but now was driving before the gale.

But swiftly toward her came a craft, which seen by the glare of the flames, was said by the crew to be a vessel-of-war.

As it came nearer, flying along under storm-sails, just in the wake of the burning craft, the vessel was seen to be an armed schooner, and brilliantly lighted up in the red glare were visible the Stars and Stripes at her peak!

Those on the Spanish vessel gave a wild cheer, for they knew that, under the American flag were brave hearts, and that all that could be done to save them, men would do.

Suddenly above the roar of the storm came a hail:

"Ahoy the barque!"

"Ay ay, senor!" came the response in Spanish, from the captain of the burning barque.

"Drop your anchors, for they will find soundings, and I will lie to near you and send boats aboard!"

The order came in good Spanish and in a voice that all on board the barque heard.

But it was no easy matter to let go the anchors, for the forward part of the craft was as hot as an oven.

Still the young Cuban boldly stepped to the front, as a volunteer; the captain and several of the crew followed his brave example, and, rushing forward, the anchors were let go.

The ship rode over them with a terrific shock, but the cables held, the barque swinging around, wallowing frightfully for a moment and then the anchors stayed her.

But she pitched wildly, and the flames now began to seize upon the main and mizzenmast, and all knew that it would be but a short while before they would either have to go overboard or burn to death.

A few of the passengers, and several of the crew, in their mad terror, sprung into the sea, and were swept to death.

"See the schooner!"

The cry came from the young Cuban, Senor Rebello.

The American vessel had swept to the side of the barque, and had come to not a cable's length away.

"The boat! the boat!" cried Jophine Rebello, and she pointed to a large boat that was bounding over the waves.

It was a boat coming from the schooner-of-war, and manned by a volunteer officer and crew, and the wild shout of joy that went up from that on the burning barque must have thrilled the hearts of the daring men who risked life to go to their rescue.

CHAPTER XX.

THE RESCUER.

"THE men who dare go to the rescue of those on yonder burning barque, will win undying fame!"

So spoke the captain of the American schooner-of-war Dolphin.

"I have a crew already, sir, and had just come to ask you to allow me to go to the rescue."

The speaker stepped before his captain, and at his back was a coxswain and eight stalwart oarsmen, who had volunteered at this call of their favorite officer.

"Well said, Lieutenant Kirkwood, and you win promotion for this," replied the captain, while a brother officer called out:

"Three cheers for Lieutenant Angelo Kirkwood and his gallant crew!"

The cheers were given with a will, and the schooner swept by the burning barque and lay to.

To launch the life-boat was no easy task, in that blow and sea.

But it was done in safety, the oars caught the water, and the life-boat started on its way toward the barque.

Standing up in the stern, the young officer watched every wave, and met them skillfully with a movement of the tiller.

In the bow stood the coxswain, a coil of stout rope in his hands.

Thus the life-boat went on its way, the winds seeming at times to fairly lift it up and drive it from the top of one huge wave to another.

At other times it would go down into a hollow of the sea and disappear, and all held their breath upon the schooner and barque, fearing that the boat was swamped.

But again it would rise to struggle on its way.

The burning barque lighted up the sea grandly, and the stern, determined face of Lieutenant Kirkwood could be seen by the waiting passengers, and prayers were uttered for his safety.

Nearer and nearer the life-boat drew, and after a desperate struggle was under the lee of the barque's stern.

Then a rope was thrown by the coxswain, and going forward, the officer went up to the deck, just as a rush of the frightened men was made to throw themselves into the boat.

With a sweep of his sword the lieutenant severed the rope that held the life-boat, and shouted:

"Hold her with your oars, coxswain, until I beat back these madmen!"

The boat was swept back for an instant, but the oarsmen recovered themselves and brought it again under the lee of the stern.

In the mean time the crew and male passengers of the barque were between two dangers, the flames, and the sword and pistol held in the hands of the young officer.

In excellent Spanish he said, and all heard him:

"Men, I came aboard this vessel to save you all."

"Do not delay me, for I will come back again for those who cannot go this time in the boat."

"But first I take every woman and child."

The men gave a yell of terror, and shouted:

"No, no! we will go now!"

"Back!"

But they pressed toward the stern, and threw themselves into the boat.

Then came the thrilling words from the young officer:

"Madmen, back, or you die!"

The terrified crew did not heed, however, and sharp rung out the crack of a pistol.

A man fell dead, and then another was struck down by a blow of the sword of the young lieutenant.

At the same moment two persons sprung to the side of the officer with weapons in their hands.

They were the Cuban gentleman and the barque's captain.

Thus checked by certain death in their front, the maddened men fell back; a rope was quickly thrown from the boat, and one after the other the women and children were lowered in safety.

"Come, senorita!" called out the young officer, addressing Jophine Rebello.

"I will await and go with my father, senor, thank you," was the brave reply.

"There will be room enough for your father also, senorita. Come, do not delay!"

She hesitated, but he seized her gently, but firmly, and swung her over the side, conveying her into the arms of the coxswain.

"Now, senor," and he turned to Senor Rebello.

"Let that poor, frightened wretch go in my stead," and the Cuban pointed to the young man whom Senorita Rebello had addressed as Senor Camblas.

"He shall go, but there is room for you, too. Come, my man!"

The young Cuban sprung forward, and was dropped into the boat in safety, after which Senor Rebello followed.

"Now he will leave us!"

"He will not return!"

"He has lied to us!"

Such were the cries that were upon all sides.

Instantly the brave officer cast off the line that held the life-boat and called out:

"Take the helm, coxswain, and run the boat back. I will await your return."

"No! no! no! Come with us, sir!"

The cry came from the life-boat's crew.

"I thank you, men; but I will remain. Pull hard!"

The men were forced to obey, for they were in danger of being swamped.

Away went the life-boat on its way, while the daring lieutenant, who would not desert those whom he had promised to save, stood upon the deck of the burning barque. He watched the life-boat's perilous course, his arms folded upon his broad breast. He was perfectly calm, though the flames were sweeping toward him; the crouching, cowering men were grouped about him, and the doomed barque was plunging wildly in the mad tempest.

CHAPTER XXI.

A CHANGE OF HEART.

HOTTER and hotter grew the flames, as they ate their way along toward the stern of the barque, and those on board, some twenty in number, felt that their chances between life and death were in favor of the latter.

The Spanish captain was inspired by the cool courage, almost reckless indifference of the American officer, and was also calm; but the men were almost wild with terror.

Further and further on its way went the boat, bounding over the waves one instant, diving deep the next, until at last it disappeared under the lee of the schooner.

"Captain, I think we can save at least some of the luggage of the ladies, for the men can get along all right," said Angelo Kirkwood, turning to the Spanish captain.

"Senor American you are the bravest man I

ever saw, to think of such kindnesses for others in a moment so supreme as this," said the Spaniard.

The young officer smiled and responded: "It will but occupy our minds. Come, show me where the state-room of that very handsome young lady is."

The Spaniard obeyed, after a glance at the flames, and another to see if the boat was returning.

Entering the cabin they were gone for five minutes, when they returned with a number of packages in their arms.

The life-boat was seen on her way back, and the keen eyes of the young officer detected at once that there were twelve oarsmen in it, to the better hasten its coming.

"The brave fellows are determined to save us," he said to the captain, pointing out the fact to him.

"God bless you brave Americans, senor," cried the Spanish captain, and again they went into the cabin to return with more luggage.

When they returned the boat was close at hand, and just in time, for the heat was becoming unbearable, and the men were enveloped in wet blankets.

A moment more and the rope was thrown and made fast, and the men hastily dropped into the boat.

Until the very last the young officer remained, and then, as he cut the rope he sprang into the sea, for his clothing was on fire.

But his hands were grasped by the gallant tars, and he was drawn on board and made his way to the tiller, while the cheers of the schooner's crew rung in his ears, and a gun thundered forth its brazen note of joy, and in quick succession came others, until a salute of thirteen guns had been fired in honor of the noble lieutenant and the men who had manned the life-boat.

Through the wild waters the boat struggled, loaded deep, its course lighted up by the burning barque, now one mass of flames, and at last the schooner's lee was reached, and every man was safely gotten on board, amid wild cheers of the American tars.

And the first to grasp the hand of the young officer was Jophine Rebello, the beautiful Cuban girl, while she cried in quivering voice:

"Senor, God forever bless you for your noble deeds this night."

The young officer bowed low, and attempted to take off his hat, but it fell to pieces in his hands, while the back of his coat was in tatters.

His face too was burned red, his hair and mustache singed and upon his hands the flesh was peeling off.

"My brave Kirkwood, you are suffering greatly, I can see."

"Come into the cabin and Surgeon Sloan will take you in charge," said the schooner's captain, and he led the young officer into the cabin, carrying the Spanish captain with them, for he also had suffered from the heat.

All through the night the schooner-of-war lay to, and with the morning the storm abated and the sea went down.

The barque had burned down to the water's edge, still held by her anchors, and then had gone under with a mighty plunge.

Getting under way the schooner headed for the Cuban coast, which was not very many leagues distant, and the passengers of the ill-fated barque were all landed in safety.

Earnest indeed were the thanks bestowed upon the Americans for their noble rescue, and several of the wealthy Cubans on board joined the Senor Rebello in a generous purse for the crew of the life-boat.

As he was too ill to go on duty, the captain of the schooner-of-war, urged Lieutenant Kirkwood to remain in Havana for a few weeks, when he would again put into port for him, and Senor Rebello and his beautiful daughter would not take no for an answer, but insisted that he should become their guest at their plantation home.

Thus urged Angelo Kirkwood accepted, and by no means was he sorry, for the bright eyes of the Senorita Jophine had deeply wounded his heart.

But there was one who gritted his teeth with jealous rage at this going of Angelo Kirkwood to the home of the Rebellos.

That one was Senor Marez Camblas, the young Cuban planter whose vast estates joined that of Senor Rebello.

Well-born, good-looking, a gentleman and possessor of great wealth, Marez Camblas was sought after by many.

But his love had gone forth to Senorita Rebello, and the maiden, having seen no one she admired more, had become his promised bride.

When Jophine Rebello had gone with her father upon a trip to New Orleans where business called the Cuban planter, Senor Marez Camblas had begged leave to accompany them, and, as he was engaged to the maiden her father gave his consent.

It was upon their return voyage from New Orleans that the barque was caught in the storm and set on fire by the stroke of lightning.

The terror shown by her lover that night of horror had caused every particle of love in her

heart for him to vanish, and she regarded him with the utmost contempt.

When she beheld the noble conduct of the gallant young American officer, in contrast to the cowardice of the Cuban, she felt that she had not loved Marez Camblas, but merely supposed that she had.

Not only had Angelo Kirkwood saved the lives of those on board the barque, but he had brought to the schooner a leather sachel of her father's containing a large sum of money, and her own jewels, which would have been a very heavy loss to them.

Then, too, his thoughtful kindness in bringing clothing for herself and other lady passengers and children, had shown her that he had a nature that was as generous and thoughtful as he was brave.

After all danger was over, and he was safe on board the schooner, Senor Camblas had endeavored to laugh off the cowardice he had shown.

But he saw that Senor Rebello joined his daughter in the contempt felt for him, and he felt that he had fallen greatly from the exalted pinnacle he had occupied the day before.

"He was tried and found wanting."

"I abhor a coward."

Such had been the thought of Senorita Jophine of her lover.

Coldly polite she and her father were to him until they reached Havana, and then he had hastened ashore, glad to get out of sight of the eyes of the maiden, which seemed so full of scorn for him.

"She will forget it all in a few days and come around," he muttered, as he went to a hotel to make himself comfortable, intending to keep away from the Rebello Plantation for a week at least.

CHAPTER XXII.

DISCARDED.

It was with intense bitterness that Senor Marez Camblas read the accounts in the papers, following the rescue of those on the barque, and praising the young American officer to the skies.

"I am glad his accursed ship has gone, for were he to remain here Jophine Rebello would fall in love with him I am sure, for she was most devoted to him as it was."

So said the young Cuban, and, as no one had a word to say against his conduct, he found himself such a hero among his friends, that he really began to regard himself as a hero.

After a sojourn in the town of some two weeks, in which he was feted by all, as a man who had been snatched from the grave, he determined to return to his home.

His plantation was a vast one, his slaves he numbered by the hundred, and he enjoyed living in the luxury which his wealth procured for him.

His parents were dead, and brother or sister he had none, so that he was his own master and untrammelled by any ties except his engagement to Jophine Rebello.

The mansion of the young planter was a large one and very elegant in every appointment, and happy had been those of his intimate friends who had been invited out to spend a few weeks at The Palms, as the place was called.

So out to The Palms went Marez Camblas, and the next day he rode over on horseback to call at Rebello Hall, as the plantation home of the Senor Rebello was known.

The mother of Jophine was dead, and so the maiden was mistress of her father's home, and a good one she made too, for the hospitality of Rebello Hall was famous.

Although he had been inveigling himself into the idea, from being lionized in town by his friends, that he had been a hero, there was a faint remembrance in the heart of Marez Camblas that perhaps the Senorita Jophine and her father might still think otherwise.

It was then with some foreboding that he rode up to the mansion and dismounted.

He threw his rein to a slave who came to take his horse and asked:

"Juan, is your mistress at home?"

"Yes, Senor Master!"

"And your master?"

"Has gone for a drive, senor, with his guest."

"Ah! there are guests here then?"

"The Senorita Jophine is alone now, Senor Master Camblas."

The young Cuban entered the hallway, when a house-servant ushered him into the large, cool parlor, at the same time bringing a silver salver of sherbet and some sweets and placing them on a little stand near him.

"The Senorita Jophine saw you coming, senor, and will soon be down," said the negress.

"You came very near never seeing us again, Anita," said the Cuban, addressing the servant, who was the maid of the Senorita Jophine.

"So the Senorita Jophine told me, senor."

"She told you that her father and myself had great difficulty in rescuing her?"

"No, senor, she did not say that," said the truthful Anita, and her remark left a disagreeable sensation upon the Cuban.

Then Anita departed and soon after there came the rustle of a dress upon the hall floor,

and the heart of Marez Camblas, from some reason sunk within him.

A moment more and Jophine Rebello swept into the room.

Superbly beautiful she looked, in a white dress of softest silk, embroidered with yellow junquils, and a bunch of fresh tea roses in her black hair.

A sash of yellow silk encircled her slender waist, and not an ornament did she wear, except a large diamond ring that glittered upon her finger.

Quickly toward her stepped the Cuban, his hand extended, and he said earnestly:

"Ah, Senorita Jophine, it seems an age since I last met you."

"I trust that you are well and in the enjoyment of supreme happiness."

She took his hand and replied:

"I am well, and happy, Senor Camblas, and I take your hand now offered, not in friendship, but in pity, for I pity you, Marez Camblas, from the very bottom of my heart."

He turned pale at her words and started back.

"You pity me, senorita?"

"I do."

"What means this insult, Senorita Rebello?"

"I mean it as no insult, senor."

"You have called upon me, when I hoped that your own good sense would keep you away, and I meant to write to you to-night."

"I have remained in Havana for a little over two weeks."

"Are you angry on that account?"

"Ah no, for I would have been glad had you remained away forever, as it would have prevented my having to perform a painful duty and dismiss you."

"Dismiss me?"

"Yes, Senor Camblas."

"What do you mean?"

"I would that your good sense would show you, senor, that you are nothing to me now, and not force me to tell you so, for it is a painful duty."

"I demand an explanation of your words," he said with anger.

"Senor Camblas, your demand shall be complied with."

"Not to a soul have I breathed, nor has my father, what took place upon the barque, and—"

"The papers are full of it."

"The papers are full of your behavior on the burning barque?"

"Then others have told it, not my father or myself."

"My behavior?" he faltered.

"Yes."

"I don't understand."

"Permit me to at once explain by saying that I pity a coward, Senor Marez Camblas."

He staggered back from her several steps, but controlling himself hissed forth:

"Do you dare insinuate that I am a coward, Senorita Rebello?"

"Your actions proved you such, Senor Camblas, and as I abhor a man who is a coward, you can no longer expect to hold my love, and I now sever all ties between us, and hand you back your ring."

She drew from her finger the brilliant diamond ring as she spoke and handed it to him.

He took it mechanically, and his eyes fairly glittered with malice as he said:

"Your father shall answer to me for this insult from your lips, Senorita Rebello," was the savage reply of the Cuban.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE TWO LOVERS.

THE words cut deep for an instant for they brought a feeling of dread to the breast of Senorita Jophine; but quickly rallying she said:

"I do not believe, Senor Camblas that you dare face my father in a *duello*, but if you dare challenge him I shall publicly denounce you as a coward and bring proof of your craven fear, your abject, groveling terror which all who were upon the burning vessel saw with pity, disgust and abhorrence in one who at least has the semblance of manhood."

He seemed fairly withered by her scathing words, and then, the coward that he was, looked as though he was about to spring upon her.

She saw the evil glitter in his eye, but did not quail.

Whether such was his intention or not, a step upon the piazza prevented his carrying it out, and in through the open window stepped a tall form in uniform.

"Pardon, senorita, I saw you as you stood there and supposed you were alone."

"Pardon, Senor Camblas," and Angelo Kirkwood bowed low and stepped back, when the Cuban hissed forth savagely:

"You here, dog of an American?"

Angelo Kirkwood was surprised and he showed it.

He had seen the cowardice of the Cuban on the burning barque, but had not referred to it in any way, treating him politely yet coldly, for he pitied the man.

He had been told by Jophine Rebello of her engagement to Marez Camblas, and that she had

believed that she loved him, but had found out her mistake, and would sever the hateful ties that bound her to the young planter.

In fact, in the three weeks that had passed since their meeting, the American officer and Cuban maiden had discovered that they were necessary to each other's happiness, and they had not disguised their love for each other, though as long as she was pledged to Marez Camblas, Lieutenant Kirkwood had asked no pledge from her to him.

Now he understood all, and, as the insult of the Cuban had been flung in his teeth, he retorted quickly, and with cutting sarcasm:

"Senor Camblas's courage seems to have returned to him, if ever he possessed such a commodity, that he insults one who he should know will waive his being a coward and hold him responsible for his words."

Maddened by the knowledge that swept over him, that Jophine had cast him off for the American, the Cuban lost his self-control and said fiercely:

"You shall eat your words, Senor American."

Then, with a muttered *maldito*, he walked from the room, and a moment after the clatter of his horse's hoofs were heard dashing down the avenue.

"Ah, senor, it is said that a woman is at the bottom of all mischief."

"Am I to blame in this case?" said Jophine, with a serious look that brought a merry laugh from the young officer, who assured her:

"My dear senorita, I simply surprised the Senor Camblas at a very inopportune moment, and I cannot blame him for his anger."

"But his words I resented, of course, and I suppose his threat meant that I should hear from him, so I will have to say *adios* to you to-night, and go go Havana, where any friend of Senor Camblas can find me."

"Oh, senor! coward though he is, it is said that he has no equal with the sword, even among the Spanish officers, and knowing this, he had the courage to insult you."

Again the American laughed, while he said:

"I am glad that he will select swords, senorita, for it will save me the sorrow of having to shoot him, for I handle a blade well myself, it is said; but here comes your father, who drove around to the stables as we came by the plantation road, and thus our approach was overheard."

"But I see that your ring, his ring, is no longer upon your finger," he said, softly.

"It means that I am free, senor."

"No, not free, Jophine, for now you belong to me—"

"Did you not say that I could, Senor Rebello?" and Angelo Kirkwood turned to Senor Rebello, who just then entered the parlor, and made answer:

"With all my heart so said I, Senor Kirkwood."

CHAPTER XXIV.

ACCOMMODATING SENOR CAMBLAS.

"My dear senor, that man Camblas will be sure to challenge you, for, strange to say, he has been engaged in several affairs of honor, and always with right upon his side, while, as Jophine says, he is a phenomenal swordsman, and therein lies his courage in being willing to meet you; but must you really go from here?"

So said Senor Rebello, as he was seated in the parlor with his daughter and their guest, after the little love scene that made Jophine and Kirkwood affianced lovers.

"I would not wait here, senor, in your home to receive the friend whom Senor Camblas will surely send, and so will thank you to send me to Havana to-night, for you know in another day I was to bid you farewell, as my vessel is due in port."

"But you will permit me to serve you in this matter, of course?"

"No, senor, I must again decline, for I wish not to widen the breach between Cubans by having you for my second; and, too, it might bring in the name of Senorita Jophine, which I wish above all things to avoid."

"Should not my vessel be in port, then I have a Spanish friend in Havana, the lieutenant upon a vessel-of-war now stationed there, and he will serve me I know, as I once acted for him in an affair with a French officer in a foreign port."

Seeing that his guest was determined to go to Havana, Senor Rebello ordered the carriage, and he and Jophine drove into town with the young officer, leaving him at the hotel.

"Be most careful, for my sake, Angelo," whispered Jophine at parting.

"Have no dread of evil, senorita," was the reply.

And the carriage of Senor Rebello drove away in the moonlight, just as a gentleman on horseback alighted at the door of the hotel and saluted Kirkwood.

It was a Cuban planter, and he bore a message from Marez Camblas.

He had gone to the Rebello Plantation, to learn that the American had driven into town, but left word that his address would be at the

hotel there, where all foreign officers were wont to put up.

"Senor Luce, this is a somewhat mixed and unfortunate affair," said Angelo Kirkwood to the young Cuban.

"Senor Camblas insulted me in language which I should have held him answerable for, and then, not liking my response, considers himself the insulted party."

"I am wholly at his service, and if I may detain you, while I send for my friend Lieutenant Madrassa of the Spanish Navy, we can arrange matters, I am sure."

The Cuban bowed assent and promised to return within the hour, and a note was at once written and dispatched by Kirkwood to his friend.

The Spanish officer was not long in making his appearance at the hotel, and was a dashing young fellow, who had the appearance of one who would rather be a second in an affair of honor than not.

He shook hands with the American officer, congratulated him upon the gallant act he had performed, in rescuing the crew and passengers of the Spanish barque, and added:

"I heard that you were to remain in Cuba a few weeks, and wanted to find you."

"But you hid yourself most thoroughly, and I had no opportunity of telling you that all of our officers and men are wild with admiration of your pluck."

Kirkwood thanked him for his complimentary words, and then said:

"Lieutenant Leon, I have a favor to ask of you."

"You have but to name it, Kirkwood, be it what it may, for I have not forgotten your kindness to me once, and I am at your service in any way, be it for gold or to fight for you."

"You have very nearly hit it, senor, for it is to ask you to be my second."

"To be sure."

"I thank you."

"Don't do it; but are you to fight here?"

"Yes."

"Spaniard?"

"No, a Cuban planter."

"He is a fool."

"For that reason I shall not kill him."

"He might not be as merciful."

"I shall insist upon swords."

"You are a good swordsman, I believe?"

"Yes."

"Who is he?"

"Senor Marez Camblas."

"Ah! he is a man to beware of, Senor Kirkwood, for he is the best swordsman in Cuba."

"So I have heard; but I shall insist upon swords, and his second will soon be here, a Senor Luce, also a planter, I believe?"

"I know him, and a clever fellow; but what is the trouble, for you should have no quarrel in Cuba?"

"The Senor Camblas considers that I insulted him, or I did not like what he said, something of the kind, and so we meet."

"Can it not be arranged?"

"I think not."

"Are you willing?"

"No, for a man who spoke as he did to me must be taught a lesson."

"Caramba! but I recall now that he was one of those you rescued from the burning ship."

"Yes."

"And does he hold no gratitude for his life?"

"I really did not ask him."

"Well, I am at your service; but I congratulate you, changing the subject, upon having rescued Senor Camblas and his beautiful daughter, for there are those in Cuba who would give their souls to have saved the fair Cuban belle from death."

"I was indeed most fortunate, Senor Leon; but there is a knock, and it is doubtless Senor Luce."

It was, and when Senor Luce departed soon after, the arrangements were all made for a meeting the next morning at sunrise, outside of the city walls at a spot where like scenes had often occurred.

In asking Senor Luce the cause of quarrel, and if the matter could not be arranged without a meeting, Lieutenant Leon received the answer:

"I am acting in the dark in this matter, Lieutenant Leon, my friend Camblas having asked me to serve him and ask no questions, and I am glad that swords are chosen, for my intentions were to allow no other weapons."

The Spanish officer smiled but made no reply, and thus the two seconds parted, to meet again on the dueling-field.

CHAPTER XXV.

AT THE SWORD'S POINT.

ANGELO KIRKWOOD did not lose sleep on account of his duel of the following morning.

He had Lieutenant Leon dine with him, and then the two officers sallied forth to see the city.

The American had fully recovered from the scorching he had gotten, though his face and hands were still red, and he had had to shave off his long silken mustache.

Bright and early the Spanish officer called for him, for his was the second watch that night on

board his vessel, and when "eight bells" struck he at once made his preparations to go to the hotel after his American friend.

Angelo Kirkwood was sleeping soundly when called, but was soon dressed, and after a cup of coffee the two friends got into a *volante* and were driven to the field.

The Cubans were already there, and had been for half an hour, arriving before the time set.

They were accompanied by a city surgeon, whom Senor Leon had asked to meet them there at the request of Marez Camblas.

The latter was pacing to and fro, "getting his hand in" by slashing down small things with his sword; but he ceased his occupation as the others drove up, and bent his head very stiffly in acknowledging the salute of his foes, for he looked upon the friend of the American also as a foe.

He was pale, and a trifle nervous, but there was a malicious look in his eyes that showed he meant to be wicked, and felt that he was master of the situation.

The arrangements were quickly made, and in a manner that showed that the seconds were by no means new to the work in hand.

Angelo threw away his cigar, bowed pleasantly to Lieutenant Leon, and grasped the hand extended to him.

The Cuban looked sullen, and hatred glared in his eyes, and the American read there a determination to put one witness of his cowardice on shipboard out of the way, and by the same fell stroke to get rid of a rival for the hand of the Senorita Rebello.

The swords crossed with a clash, and each man felt his opponent's strength for a couple of seconds.

The result did not seem to please the Cuban, for he made a lightning-like attack at once, and with a man less skilled and quick than was Angelo Kirkwood it would have then and there ended the duel.

A cry of alarm almost broke from the lips of Lieutenant Leon, but when the Cuban was foiled by the quick eye and ready hand of the American, he breathed more freely.

Thwarted in his first attack, Marez Camblas seemed to grow livid from fear or rage, and fought with a desperation that was thrilling to behold.

But, cool as an icicle, the American parried and guarded every thrust and lunge of the Cuban, and Lieutenant Leon muttered to himself:

"Kirkwood can at least keep him at bay."

Hardly were the words uttered when suddenly the American seemed to tire of acting upon the defensive, and, with quickness and skill reversed the order of things.

Camblas was taken by surprise, and well-nigh was disarmed; but he saved himself then, to find his sword twisted from his hand a moment after.

He almost swooned at the instant, as he expected his foe to run him through, and the trees seemed to be dancing before his eyes.

But the words fell sweetly upon his coward ears, that told him he was not to die:

"Senor Camblas, I did not save your life once to take it now, so accept it at my hands."

Without a word Angelo Kirkwood turned, bowed to the second and surgeon of his adversary and walked toward his *volante*.

A moment after Lieutenant Leon followed him and grasping his hand, as he threw the weapons into the vehicle, said:

"You are the best swordsman I ever saw, Kirkwood."

"See! Camblas stands like one dazed, for it hurts him to feel that he has met his master."

Kirkwood knew that another motive moved the Cuban, his fearful disappointment that he had not been able to kill him, and also the shock that he had believed his death was sure.

But he was not one to gloat over a foe, and made reply:

"Poor fellow, I pity him."

The *volante* rolled rapidly back into the city, and the two friends were just going in to breakfast, after a short rest in Kirkwood's room, when they were met by Senor Rebello, who said in a low tone, as he grasped the extended hand of the American:

"Well, senor?"

"All over."

"Thank Heaven you are unharmed!"

"I offer the same prayer for Camblas, senor."

"Ah! he is unharmed?"

"Yes, senor."

"But you fought?"

"Oh yes."

"And the result?"

"Neither were harmed."

"Senor Rebello, my friend Kirkwood is too modest to tell the truth, so I will do so for him."

"Camblas expected a walk-over, and, after the most magnificent bit of swordsmanship on both sides I ever witnessed, our American friend disarmed him and gave him his life."

"Ever generous, senor," said Senor Rebello with feeling, and as he walked on with them to the breakfast-room he added in a low tone:

"Jophine made me leave home before dawn to know the result."

"God bless her," was the earnest reply of the young American.

CHAPTER XXVI.

A BITTER BLOW.

SENIOR LUCE, who returned home with Marez Camblas, found him anything but a pleasant companion.

The two had been friends of long standing; but Senor Luce was almost hurt by the manner of the defeated duelist.

He saw that he was deeply cut from some cause, more than his having found his master with the sword, and said in a kindly tone:

"Well, Marez, don't take it so to heart, for I do not think either the American officer or Leon will speak of the affair, the surgeon will not, and you know I will keep it a dead secret, so that it will not reach the ears of the Senorita Rebello."

The eyes of Camblas fairly blazed at this, and he said fiercely:

"Straight to her ears it will go."

"But I care not, for she is nothing to me now."

Senor Luce was surprised, for he knew of the engagement that had existed between his friend and the Senorita Jophine, so he said:

"Do you mean that your engagement with her is broken?"

"Yes."

"I am sorry."

"I am crushed under it; but she shall not know that I suffer."

"Bah! I am a fool to think of her; but she is nothing to me now, Luce."

His friend asked no questions, for he saw he was in no humor to be catechized, and they rode on in silence until they reached the Camblas plantation.

There the horse of Senor Luce awaited him, and he rode off to his home, leaving Camblas in a most unenviable humor.

Days went by and then the rumor went about that Senor Camblas had been discarded by the beauty and the heiress, Senorita Jophine Rebello, and that she was soon to wed the gallant young American, Angelo Kirkwood.

Marez Camblas heard the rumor, and a few days after he left his home, and report came that he had purchased a yacht and was cruising about the West Indies.

One day, after several months' absence, he returned to Havana, and it was not long in reaching his ears that Lieutenant Kirkwood had come to Cuba, married Jophine Rebello, and, resigning from the Navy of the United States was then living at the home of his beautiful wife.

A few days after he met them face to face while out riding, and all the venom of his nature seemed aroused, and he gritted through his teeth:

"I will yet have my revenge upon both of them."

Half a year after his first revenge came, for Senor Rebello, having lost heavily in some speculation, raised money upon his plantation and slaves by mortgage.

That mortgage the young Cuban bought, and when Senor Rebello could not pay, having met with other reverses, Marez Camblas turned him, his daughter and son-in-law out of doors.

Having brought this misfortune upon those he loved, the high spirited planter in his great grief, took his own life, thus bringing deep sorrow upon Jophine and her American husband.

Undismayed by his afflictions, Angelo Kirkwood took his wife and their little boy to the seacoast, settled them in an humble but pleasant home, and with what money they had saved purchased a vessel and began to run it as a coast trader.

Fortune smiled upon him, and happy in his love, and the hope of better days coming back to them, Jophine tried to forget the bitter past.

Thus time went by until five years had passed since her marriage to Angelo Kirkwood, and she had two children, Angelo her first born, and Bonita, a baby girl, to bless her life.

Seated one afternoon in her humble home, with her baby girl upon her lap and little Angelo playing near her in the yard, she was glancing out over the sea, hoping for the coming of her husband's vessel which was beyond due several days.

"This is the anniversary day of our marriage," she mused aloud.

"Five years ago to-day I became the wife of Angelo Kirkwood, and he is dearer to me now than ever before."

"But how I dread these anniversary days, for just one year after our marriage, father lost by that investment which a Havana merchant inveigled him into, all of his money."

"The next year to a day he mortgaged the plantation and slaves, to find out that it was Marez Camblas who had advanced the money and held the mortgages."

"Oh! how hard he and Angelo tried to get the money to pay off the amount; but in vain, and on the day of our third marriage anniversary we were turned out of our home by that man Camblas, who had his revenge."

"Poor father tried hard to bear up and struggle on; but one year ago to-day he died by his own hand in his despair."

"And to-day!"

"Oh! how I dread it, for Angelo's vessel is

overdue, and I almost fear some new sorrow will overwhelm me."

She took a sea-glass as she spoke and slowly swept the waters with it.

But no vessel was in sight, and she laid it down with a sigh.

Just then she saw a horseman crossing toward the cottage.

He was travel-stained and his horse seemed to have been ridden hard.

Her heart almost ceased its pulsations, and for a moment she could not move.

Then she called to an old negress, her only servant, and said:

"Remain with me, Sara, for I dread some great evil."

"See that horseman, and he is coming here."

The horseman rode up to the little wall that surrounded the cottage, dismounted and asked:

"Is this the home of the Senora Kirkwood?"

"It is."

"And you are—"

"Senora Kirkwood."

"I have a letter for you."

"Give it to me."

The man obeyed and at the same time said:

"I come from Havana, senora, and I have ridden hard to bring you this letter, for it is important, and I fear sad news."

She opened it without reply, for she recognized the handwriting of her husband upon the envelope.

Then she read it slowly, and every word burned into her heart and brain.

What she read was as follows:

"CASTLE EL MORO."

"MY OWN JOPHINE:—"

"I was arrested to-day as a conspirator against Spain, and thrown into this prison."

"My vessel was searched and on it were found arms and munitions of war, which it was said I was to carry to the insurgents on the Southern coast."

"I am no conspirator, as you know, and how those arms came to be in the hold of my vessel, I do not know."

"But I am accused and must abide the result."

"Hope for the best, and pray for me."

"ANGELO."

"God have mercy! there is no hope, for he is doomed I know but too well," and with a low moan the stricken wife slipped from her chair upon the floor in a swoon.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THWARTED.

LEAVING her children with old Sara, the negress, as soon as she was able to do so, the poor wife started for Havana.

She carried with her all of the money that she and her husband had laid by, and several jewels, which had belonged to her mother, and which alone she had left of her former riches.

"I will sacrifice all to save him," she had said, as she started in a *volante* for Havana, the driver her only companion.

Just at twilight they came to a desolate piece of roadway, and she shivered as she remembered that many murders had been committed there, and it was the spot where the highwaymen often demanded toll of travelers.

"Drive rapidly, my man," she said, thinking of the little fortune she had with her, and regretting that she had not gone by sea to Havana.

The driver was about to whip up his horses, in obedience, for he also did not like to pass the spot, when suddenly into the roadway, ahead and behind the *volante*, dashed two horsemen, coming out of the dense thicket on the side of the highway.

The horsemen were armed, and they leveled their pistols at the driver, while one called out:

"Halt! you must pay toll!"

"I have but this defenseless lady with me, senors, going to see her husband, who has been thrown into the Castle El Moro, so pray let me drive on," said the driver.

"No one passes here without toll."

"You would not rob a woman, senors?"

"Hush!" was the stern command, and riding up to the side of the *volante*, the horseman said:

"Senora, you are rather well supplied with gold."

"Oh, senor, for the love of Heaven, let me keep my gold, for it is all that I have in the wide world, and I may need it, every peso, to save my husband from death."

"Nothing will save your husband, Senora Kirkwood, so out with the gold."

"Oh, senors, I pray to you to let me keep my gold!"

"No, out with it!"

The two men had dismounted and both stood by the vehicle, one on either side, and they held forth their hands.

"I'll get it for you, senors, if it must go," said the driver, and he bent over to raise the bag of gold, which was between the senora's feet.

She had not the power to speak or move, but sunk back upon the cushions, her face the picture of despair.

"There, you awkward fool, you have spilled it out!" cried one.

"I got hold of the wrong end of the bag, senors; but it is worth the picking up."

The highwaymen seemed to be of this opinion, for each bent over and began to rake up the golden onzas.

But suddenly upon the head of one fell a stunning blow, while with remarkable dexterity the two horses were struck with the lash and bounded forward.

One of the highwaymen was struck senseless by the blow, the other was knocked down by the bounding forward of the horses, and the wheel passed over him certainly injuring him, for the driver saw him twice try to rise before he staggered to his feet.

Then like the wind the horses flew on, while the poor wife with tears of joy in her eyes, cried:

"Nobly done, my brave man, for you have perhaps saved my husband's life in saving my gold."

"I hope so, senora; but I thought when these scamps saw the gold spill they would be off their guard, and so I struck sharp and quick."

"Don't fear, for we have too good a start for them to catch us now, even if they are not badly hurt, which, I hope and believe they are."

"The Holy Mother bless you, good senor."

"I hope it will help to get pardon for some of my sins, for I have not been the best of men, senora."

"But did you notice that those men knew you?"

"Yes, I recall now that they did."

"They knew also that you had gold."

"Yes."

"They also were aware that the senor was in the castle."

"They did know it, and said, alas! that nothing would save him."

"Senora, this looks to me as though there was some one dogging you for harm."

The woman started at the words of the driver, and said in a low voice:

"It does so seem, senor, and now that I recall the past five years I believe that you are right."

"Ay, senor, I almost begin to feel that I know who my foe is," was the reply of Senora Kirkwood, and her emotion touched the heart of the driver, who was very proud of his act in thwarting the highwaymen, as he had cause to be.

In good time the *volante* reached Havana, and the senora, knowing no humble lodging-house, went to the fashionable hotel where she had been wont to put up with her father, when she was a reigning belle in Cuban society.

As soon as she had gotten rid of the stain of travel, she sallied forth to seek some influence that would enable her to see her husband.

But, though friends had been many in her prosperity, in her adversity they were few, and those did not dare interest themselves in behalf of the wife of a conspirator.

In vain she pleaded, they said they could do nothing.

Then she went to the Castle El Moro and sought the governor of that huge pile.

He would not permit her to enter without a permit from the captain general.

To that dignitary then she went, and was sternly refused, with an admonition that she should at once leave Havana.

Her pleadings were of no avail, for the Governor of Cuba then was a stern, unyielding and heartless man.

In her despair she could do nothing, and again threatened, if she remained in Havana, with imprisonment herself, she was forced to return home, for though her husband she could not help, she certainly could do much for her children.

Worn out, suffering in body and mind, she reached her home, and then her strength gave way; she was seized with high fever and for weeks lay hovering between life and death.

When at last she recovered, she said one day to the old negress who had been her devoted friend:

"Sara, let us go from here."

"Go where, senora?"

"Away from Cuba."

"Leave Cuba, senora?"

"Yes, Sara, so get ready as soon as you can."

"But where will you go, senora?"

"To America, by the first packet, for, Sara, I know all."

"Oh, senora!"

"Yes, when you deemed me unconscious one day, I heard all that was said, so let us go."

And the next packet to New Orleans carried the stricken woman, her children and good old Sara.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE RIVAL'S REVENGE.

THERE was no doubt but that contraband articles had been found on this little trading-craft, which was owned and commanded by Angelo Kirkwood.

The Insurgents had been causing the Spanish governor trouble, and they were outlawed as bandits, and no mercy was shown to those who aided them in any way.

There was a general feeling among Cubans

that Cuba should be free from Spanish rule, yet few had taken up arms against Spain to gain that freedom, and those few were "Insurgents," as they were named.

When therefore suspicion fell upon Angelo Kirkwood, as secretly a member of the Insurgent band, his vessel was seized in port, and on board was found a supply of arms, munitions of war and supplies, to be landed at a certain point upon the southern coast, where the insurrectionary element was then giving trouble.

Angelo Kirkwood protested his innocence, but the proofs were against him, for, among his private papers the guards found letters that stamped him as a secret ally of the Insurgents.

He was an American and had been a naval officer of the United States Government, while he was offered a high position in the Cuban Patriot service.

Known to be poor with nothing to lose and much to gain, in case of success, no one believed him otherwise than guilty, and so he was thrown into a dungeon in the Moro Castle.

There he sat in his loathsome cell, several days after the departure of his poor wife for her home, without being able to see him or communicate with him.

That Spaniards would cry out for his life he well knew, and having become a Cuban, he could expect no interference on the part of the Government of the United States.

So he made up his mind from the first that there was no hope.

He did not fear death, but the thought of leaving his loved wife and children was a fearful one to him.

He had just begun to work up to a comfortable subsistence for those he idolized, and now must leave them to the cold charities of a cruel world.

He had written the letter to his wife, under inspection, that he might be the first to break the news to her of his arrest and the charge against him.

The guards told him that she had come to Havana, but had been refused permission to see him, though she had gone and begged it of the captain-general.

Failing, she had gone back to her children.

He did not know, as he sat there in his dismal cell, that she was then lying at the point of death, or his misery would have been greater.

Soon a flashing light along the gloomy corridors told him that some one was approaching his cell.

Low voices were heard without, footsteps were heard walking away, and then the door opened.

A man stood there, lantern in hand.

It was not a keeper, but none other than Marez Camblas.

"Well, sir, to what chance do I owe this misfortune of your presence here?" said the American, sternly:

"I am here, Kirkwood, to have a few words with you."

"Make them few then, Senor Camblas."

"You are here as a conspirator against Spain?"

"That I know."

"You were intending to run out of Havana with a cargo of arms for the Insurgents."

"That is the charge against me, but it is to be proven."

"The arms on your vessel are proof, with papers found there offering you terms in the Insurgents' service."

"If such things were found, then I am doomed."

"You surely are."

"Then why come to persecute me in my last hours, for I will be executed?"

"Yes, in two days."

"So soon?"

"Yes."

"I am ready."

"The governor-general, knowing me to have been friendly to you—"

"You, my friend?"

"Yes."

"I cannot believe it."

"Did you not twice save my life?"

"That causes hatred sometimes, for it is a debt not readily repaid."

"Well, I am your friend, in my peculiar way, and the governor-general told me, as I was saying, to come and tell you that you must die."

"I said I was ready."

"You are to be hanged."

"Oh, God! not that!"

"Yes, you are to be hanged, so says the governor-general, Senor Kirkwood."

For a moment the brave man was silent, and then he said:

"I am ready to die, be it in any way that Spanish cruelty may dictate."

"Well it is hard to be hanged, so I will try and see if I can get the sentence mitigated, for, as I am to marry your widow, I would rather not have it said that my wife's first husband was hanged like a common murderer."

Angelo Kirkwood heard the man through to the end of his sentence, and then, with a cry as savage as a wild beast's, he sprung toward the insulter.

But the chains that held him to the floor of

his cell checked him, and he was dragged back with a force that threw him upon the stone flooring heavily.

A little laugh broke from the lips of the Cuban as he jumped back out of reach, though he had blanched with terror at the spring of the prisoner toward him, and he said in tones that were full of malicious deviltry:

"Now I have my revenge upon you, Senor American, and when I make the Senora Jophine my wife, I will be avenged upon her."

With this he turned and left the cell and Angelo Kirkwood was alone with his bitter thoughts, now more terribly bitter as he knew he would leave his beautiful wife and children to the mercy of a fiend in human form.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE CONSPIRATOR'S FATE.

It was a gala day in Havana, for that gay people liked any scene that was out of the usual run, in the way of excitement.

And what was to occur that day was certainly out of the usual run, for an execution was to take place.

The insurgent element must be taught a lesson.

The conspirators against Spanish rule in the Gem of the Antilles must be shot without mercy.

The Spanish troops had met the Patriot forces over on the southern coast, and had annihilated their little army, excepting a few who had been captured.

These "few," a score in number, had been spared, not from mercy, but to suffer a fate as a warning to others.

They had been brought in chains to Havana, and, thrown into the castle, were awaiting their doom.

What need of a trial, when they were caught with arms in their hands, firing upon Spanish soldiers?

A trial would have been a mockery.

So they were sentenced to death very promptly, and it was the day appointed for their execution that set Havana wild with excitement.

There were many in the vast throng, wending their way to the scene of execution, who sympathized with the doomed men.

But they dared not say so, dared not even feel, if they showed that feeling in their face, for suspicious eyes were upon them, and the governor-general was known to be a man without mercy.

He had been sent out to the Gem of the Antilles to rule it, by the Spanish monarch, and he meant to do so in his own way, without heart and with a rod of iron as a scepter.

Twenty-one men were to die, and among them were the officers of the Patriot band, who had dared attempt to throw off the yoke of Spain.

The twenty-first was Angelo Kirkwood, the only American of the lot.

Perhaps for that reason the hatred against him seemed to be most bitter.

At an early hour of the morning throngs of citizens were wending their way toward the scene of the executions.

All were invited most cordially, for it was to be an execution "as an example."

The more that witnessed the death of their fellow-beings, the greater would be the example.

The soldiers moved out early also, to enlivening music, and formed three sides of a hollow square.

The populace took up positions of vantage, where they could see all that took place, and the captain-general was anxious that they should see.

A murmur of expectancy arose from a thousand throats, and to keep the vast crowd in good humor, the bands played enlivening music.

At last a gun boomed forth from the castle. It was the signal that the *cortege* had started for the scene of execution.

Instantly a hush fell upon all, and even the birds in the trees ceased their trilling.

Out of their gloomy cells, into the broad glare of day, marched the doomed men.

There were twenty-one of them in all.

Before them, behind them, and upon either side marched their soldier guards, their arms reversed.

Thus the prisoners were in a wall of bayonets. Ahead rode the governor of the castle, with a brilliant escort.

Then came a band, and it was playing a dirge, fitting music for the death-scene that was to follow.

A body of horsemen brought up the rear.

Slowly moved the force toward the scene where those twenty-one men were to die.

They marched in grim silence, with solemn tread keeping time to the music of the band.

The heads of the prisoners were downcast, their eyes upon the ground with one exception.

That one was Angelo Kirkwood.

His air was martial, his bearing fearless.

He kept time to the music, his gaze was straight ahead, and he marched like one who had no fear of death.

The Spanish officers were angry at his bearing.

It had the tendency to show men that one could be a conspirator and yet hold no fear of death.

Louder and louder grew the music, as the military *cortege* drew near the fatal scene.

Then they came in sight, and filed slowly into position.

The captain-general was already there, grim, silent and determined.

There was also his staff in brilliant array, and a few prominent citizens in carriages, among the latter being Senor Camblas.

The face of the latter was pale, and his manner was nervous; but a glitter of hate and anticipated triumph commingled, shone in his eyes.

Nearer and nearer came the *cortege*, and halting near the captain-general, the doomed men were led to their positions.

They were all, with that one exception, downcast.

But that one, Angelo Kirkwood, still held his form erect, still met the gaze of those about him with calm defiance.

His eyes met those of the Cuban planter, but Senor Camblas could not meet that steady gaze unflinchingly, and he looked away with the air of a culprit.

Angelo Kirkwood smiled, and stood ready to meet his fate.

The others were ranged into line, five at a time, and shot.

They begged for no mercy, were silent and stern, and died bravely.

Four times the volley rung out from the execution squad, and twenty men lay dead in their tracks.

Not once did Angelo Kirkwood flinch.

He stood erect, his eyes upon the death scene, and with a face as unmoved as though he were not the most deeply interested one of all those lookers-on.

At last his time came, and he walked with bold tread to the spot at the head of his coffin.

He faced his executioners, glanced toward Marez Camblas and smiled; but it was a smile which the Cuban never forgot to his dying day.

Then came the command to the officer of the execution squad, and a murmur of admiration rung through the crowd at the splendid courage of the American conspirator.

Another moment and the muskets cracked together and the brave spirit of Angelo Kirkwood had been sent from its body—the conspirator had met his fate.

CHAPTER XXX.

A COWARD.

OLD Sara, the negress who had gone to New Orleans with Jophine Kirkwood and her children, was going along the street one day, market-basket in hand, when a man who was passing stopped, gazed at her, and then, as she passed on, without seeing him apparently, he slowly followed her.

She made a few purchases and then turned her steps toward the outskirts of the city.

The man was watching her, and he slowly followed.

His dark face betrayed his Spanish origin, and a closer look showed that he was none other than Senor Marez Camblas.

He was elegantly dressed, and appeared the Cuban gentleman; but a black heart lay beneath his polished exterior.

When he saw the old negress start toward the outer edge of the city, he hastily walked after her.

He arranged to overtake her where there was no house near, or any person who could hear what he said to her.

"Sara, how are you?"

He spoke in Spanish, and the old woman started, turned around, and gazed at the speaker.

"Do you not know me, Sara?"

"I have seen you somewhere before, senor."

"I am your master."

"No, senor, my master is in Cuba."

"What are you doing here, then?"

"I came with a poor lady, senor, to whom I have been hired out for service for some years."

"You belonged to Senor Cassandra, of Matanzas?"

"Yes, senor, the Senor Cassandra is my master, and he gave me permission to come here."

"Well, Sara, I remembered to have seen you several times, half a year ago, when you were living with the Senora Kirkwood, and I took a notion I would like to own you."

"Own me, senor?"

"Yes, Sara, and so I purchased you."

"See, here are my papers, proving you to be my property, and you must go back with me to Cuba."

"Ah, senor! it would break the poor senora's heart to have me leave her."

"Where is she?"

"She lives in that white cottage, senor, on the river."

"Ah, yes; but you must go with me, Sara."

"If you have bought me, senor, I suppose I have to; but the senora will pay you for my

hire, as she does Senor Cassandra, and he could not refuse to let her bring me with her, for he saw how sad she was.

"You know it is only five months since her poor husband was shot by the Spanish governor."

"Yes, I know, and I have had hard work to find you, for Senor Cassandra would not tell where you had gone with the Senor Kirkwood."

"But when I offered three thousand pesos for you, he accepted."

"I am not worth that much, senor."

"You are to me, and you must go with me now."

"Oh, senor! let me go home first."

"No, you must go at once."

"But, senor."

"If you do not go, I have officers near who will take you in irons."

"I will go, senor, for I would rather die than have irons put on me," and the old negress shuddered.

"You are mine."

"But, senor."

"Well."

"Will you go and tell the good senora that I did not desert her?"

"I will."

"Senor, what is my new master's name, for I cannot recall it?"

"Never mind my name, for you will know soon enough."

"Come."

Sara was a slave, in a foreign land, and she felt that she must obey.

So with a deep sigh she did as Senor Camblas ordered her.

A passing carriage was called and she was driven to a vessel about to sail for Havana.

A few words from the rich and influential Cuban and the captain took Sara in charge.

Then the man who was still dogging the steps of a lone woman, started out at a brisk walk toward the outskirts of the city.

His steps were directed toward the little cottage which had been pointed out to him as the home of the Senora Kirkwood.

It was an humble little house, with but four rooms, a kitchen garden in the rear, a flower garden in front, and all carefully attended to.

Upon the little piazza, as he came up he saw a person seated.

It was Jophine Kirkwood and she was in deep mourning.

Near her, playing with her doll was her little girl scarcely over a year old, but her boy was nowhere visible.

The man approached and leant upon the little gate, not ten paces from her.

Busy with her sewing, the senora did not at first observe him, and so lightly had he approached that she heard not his step.

"Senora Kirkwood, good-evening."

He spoke in Spanish, and a cry escaped her lips as she beheld him.

One glance was sufficient for her to recognize him.

She sprang to her feet, and pale and trembling cried:

"You here, Senor Camblas?"

"As you see, Senora Jophine."

"And why do you haunt me with your hated presence?"

"I came here to see you."

"Have I not suffered enough without this?"

"I am your friend, Senora Jophine."

"My bitterest foe, say rather, for I owe to you all of the sorrow and suffering that has come upon me and mine."

"Ah, no, I am not a bad man, senora."

"I have loved you from our first meeting, and once I expected you to become my wife."

"You cast me off, because you saw another whom you liked better."

"You became his wife, and misfortune overtook you."

"I have prospered, for I am very rich now, and steadily my riches increase."

"There is one beautiful woman whom I could marry, and her parents wish her to be my wife."

"But I love you, and I have come here to ask you to marry me."

"Return to Cuba as my wife, and the best in the land shall be yours; but, understand me, his children shall never cross the threshold of my door."

He ceased speaking, and he fairly shrunk under the look of withering scorn that rested upon her face.

At last her words rung out:

"Become your wife, Senor Camblas?"

"Sooner would I suffer the fate of my noble husband."

"Become the wife of so base a man, one who is an arrant coward, one whom I loathe and hate, as the author of my wretchedness and widowhood, for such I believe you?"

"Ah, no! sooner would I suffer the torments of the damned through an eternity."

"Go, senor, go! leave me and my children alone."

"I live for them, so don't force me to do that which would send me to prison, perhaps to the gallows, and leave them alone."

"I am strong for their sake; but go!"

"I will go, but let me tell you, Senora Jophine, that I purchased of Senor Cassandra your

woman, Sara, and she is now upon the Havana packet, to return with me."

"Holy Heaven! you have taken her from me?"

"Yes, so you had better go with me and become my wife."

"I will forgive your words, I will even relent and allow you to take your children, if—"

"Go from me! Never cross my path again, or by the Heavenly Cross I will kill you, Marez Camblas."

"Go!"

He opened the gate, as though to enter, when she sprung into the door and seized a pistol that hung there, one that had belonged to her husband.

He suspected her intention, and when she reappeared upon the piazza, the weapon in her hand, he was retreating rapidly.

He saw the weapon, and, with a yell of terror, he bounded away like a deer.

She watched him until he was out of sight, and then she said:

"I have nothing more to fear from him."

"I will answer the letter I received yesterday, and tell the attorney who holds the small inheritance my aunt has left me, in his keeping, that I will come to Cuba at once, and dwell at the pretty little home near Cardenas."

"It will keep me from want, with the four slaves that also become mine."

"Sara has gone, good, faithful Sara, and I will soon follow with my little children."

"But I will take my own name once more—yes, my children will be Angelo and Bonita Rebello for the future."

And one month after the sorrowing woman was settled in the little home near Cardenas, left her by a maiden aunt, along with four slaves, and to that home, where Angelo Rebello is grown up and his sister Bonita is a beautiful maiden of eighteen, the reader has been already taken, so now my story will follow on as before this retrospective glance into the lives of those who have figured in the earlier pages of this romance.

CHAPTER XXXI.

OLD SARA'S REQUEST.

"SEÑORITA VALITA, Sara asked me to tell you to please come over to the quarter and visit her, for she wished to tell you something."

So said the pretty quadroon maid of Valita Camblas, entering the room of her young mistress, a few days after the dinner at the captain-general's, which Major Rovalez had not enjoyed as much as the others present.

And, knowing Señor Camblas's past life, as the reader now does, it can be readily understood that what was said by Don Quixote to Major Rovalez also hit him pretty well, for he had been urgently anxious to have the Spanish officer push the death penalty against Angelo Rebello, the son of the man who had so hated, the son of the woman who had discarded him and called him a coward.

He had learned experience with years, and was too shrewd to mix himself up in the plot against the young sailor; but knowing that he was the son of Angelo Kirkwood, the American who had been shot as a conspirator, he was anxious to have him executed as a pirate that it might be another blow at Jophine.

In answer to the request of Fidela, Valita said:

"How is poor old Sara, Fidela?"

"Poorly, señorita, and she says she won't last long, and has something to tell you."

"Something to tell me?"

"Yes, señorita."

"What can it be, I wonder?"

"I don't know, señorita; but I was telling her all about the capture of the yacht by the Lagoon Pirates, and the rescue by Señor Angelo Rebello, and how he had been treated as a pirate himself, and she fairly sat up in bed and looked at me."

"I thought she was going to die right then."

"But she dropped back upon her pillow and told me to ask you to come and visit her."

"I said I would go at once, and she made me stop and tell her all over again."

"Then I came; but I guess old Sara isn't just right, señorita."

"I will go at once, and you accompany me, Fidela."

Throwing on a light wrap, and hiding her pretty head under a sun-hat, Valita started for the slave's quarters.

One of the little cabins stood off by itself, and seemed to be more favored than the others.

In this one dwelt Sara, the negress whom some eighteen years before Señor Camblas had purchased that he might take her away from Señor Kirkwood.

Three score of years and ten had passed over the old woman's head; but her mind was clear, though her body was dying.

She greeted the maiden pleasantly, and was sitting up in an easy-chair to receive her.

Sara had often received many little kindnesses from Valita, who was wont to visit the slaves' quarters every Sabbath day, and the aged sick were ever remembered by her young heart.

She knew that, for some reason, her father treated Sara differently.

There were other slaves on the place whom he had inherited from his father; but old Sara seemed the favored one of all.

"Ah, señorita, I knew you would come, and old Sara is glad to see you, so very glad."

"Sit down, señorita, sit down, for old Sara wishes to talk to you."

Valita took the trembling hand and then said: "Here, Sara, Fidela has some jelly for you, and a bottle of wine."

"Put them there, Fidela, and go off to walk for a little while, for old Sara wants to see Señorita Valita all alone."

"You are so good, señorita, and just like the angels I soon will be."

Fidela had curiosity, and this dismissal by old Sara caused her to pout; but she walked off, feeling assured that her young mistress would tell her what the old negress said to her, and wondering what it could be.

"Now, señorita, I want you to listen to what I have to say, and if you get angry remember that old Sara is all but in her grave."

"Fidela was telling me all about your cruise in the pretty yacht, and it brought back to my mind scenes in the past."

"She told me who it was that saved you from the pirates, and how near he came to being hanged as a pirate, and that but for you he would have been."

"She told me he was so handsome, and that she knew he could not help but love you, and she hoped you would love him."

"All this set me to thinking, señorita, and so I want to tell you what I know."

The old woman spoke distinctly, her eyes lighted up with intelligence, and her manner and words impressed Valita deeply.

The maiden felt that what she said was not the raving of a wandering mind, but that old Sara held some secret of the past which she wished to make known.

"I will gladly hear what you have to say, Sara, and certainly you can say nothing that will anger me."

"I may, señorita, but then I have no fear now of your father."

"A single blow would kill me; but I hope that you will keep locked up in your heart all that I have to tell you."

"But knowing it, you can act with your eyes wide open, and if plots are made to do more harm, your good heart, señorita, will not allow those who are innocent to suffer from one who still seeks revenge."

"Now, señorita, will you hear what old Sara has to tell, or do you shrink from hearing what may give you pain?"

"No! I do not shrink."

"I will hear all that you have to tell me, good Sara," was the firm reply of the brave young girl.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE NEGRESS'S STORY.

DEEPLY moved by the manner of old Sara, Valita Camblas drew her chair up close to her side, and said:

"Now, good Sara, your story."

"Señorita, walls have ears, and I would die in peace, so I beg you to go out and place Fidela on guard."

"Let her watch for any one coming near this cabin, and call out to you as a warning."

"I will do so," and the maiden obeyed, more than ever impressed with the belief that old Sara had no idle tale to tell.

When she had returned and resumed her seat, after having placed Fidela on watch, old Sara began her story at once, and in a stronger voice than Valita had believed her capable of, for the old woman had been an invalid a year past.

"You know," she began, "that I have belonged to your father only about eighteen years, señorita?"

"Yes."

"He bought me just about a year before you were born."

"Your father was a rich young man, for he inherited a big plantation and plenty of slaves from his father, and he expected to marry a beautiful young lady whose father's home adjoined his."

"I used to belong to the young lady's father, and a dear good master he was."

"But somehow, señorita, the Lord did not have matters come out as your father wished."

"He went with the planter and his daughter on a voyage, the ship got caught in a storm, the lightning struck it and set it on fire, and all would have died but for an American cruiser coming near."

"A young officer risked his life to save all on the burning ship, and he did so, and your father and the young lady and her father all owed their lives to him."

"I was housekeeper then in the family, and I heard talk as how your father had not behaved very bravely on the burning ship."

"Sara!"

"Don't get angry, señorita, for I am telling you what I heard the planter and his daughter say."

"The young American officer was severely burned, and he came out home with my people,

while your father stayed in Havana at the hotel."

"Some two weeks after your father came over to our plantation, from his home, The Palms, where he was then living, and he did not know the American officer was visiting there."

"There was a scene, and my young mistress discarded your father and handed him back his ring."

"I do not care to hear of my father's early life, Sara, so you need say no more."

"Señorita, what you hear is from dying lips. Sealed by death as they soon will be, no one else can tell you the story, or will do so."

"But I will say no more."

"Go on, good Sara, for I was wrong to get angry with you."

"Thank you, señorita, for I am glad to tell the truth."

"You father was so angry that he challenged the American officer, and a duel followed, in which the señor spared the life of master."

"And my father the superb swordsman that he is?"

"The American señor was a better one, señorita."

"Ah!"

"Some time after the American señor came back to Havana and was married to my young mistress."

"But ill-fortune seemed to come, for my master lost his money, then the plantation and slaves were mortgaged, your father advancing the money, and then a year after he got all."

"I was sold, with a few other slaves, and Señor Cassandra bought me."

"The señor, my old master, went mad, at his losses, and took his own life; and his daughter, and her handsome husband, the American—"

"What was his name?"

"Señor Kirkwood, señorita."

"Go on, Sara."

"They were left awful poor, and went to dwell at the sea-coast."

"There the young señor got work to do as a mate on a coasting vessel, and the señora hired me, her old slave, to live with them, for Señor Cassandra felt sorry for her and allowed me to go."

"Well, señorita, the years went by, and the handsomest boy and baby girl I ever saw, were the señora's children."

"The boy was like his mother and father both, but the little girl had the red-gold hair of her American father."

"The señor soon made money enough to buy a small *goleta*, and became its master, running cargoes from the coast ports to Havana, for he did not care to go far from home."

"And he was so happy when he returned home from a voyage, as was his wife and children too, for the little baby girl knew him, it seemed, and would laugh and crow at him in a way that made his heart glad."

"One day, señorita, the master did not come home, when due."

"Then another day passed, and next came a courier with a letter."

"It nearly killed the poor señora, for it told that her husband was in the Castle El Moro, accused of being an Insurgent."

"His vessel had been seized, and upon it were found arms and papers which condemned him."

"The señora left the children with me and went to Havana."

"Highwaymen watched for her and tried to rob her, for she had carried what gold she had, and some old jewelry with her to try and get her husband out."

"She escaped from the highwaymen though, and reached Havana; but though she pleaded and prayed to the castle governor, and the captain-general, they would not let her see her husband."

"Don Quixote Buriel was not captain-general then, was he?"

"Ah no, señorita; it was a governor who had no heart, to refuse her pleading."

"And then, señora?"

"She returned home to her children, señorita."

"She was sick with fever when she arrived, and it was long weeks before she recovered."

"But one day she was able to sit up and she told me she would live for her children."

"She told me too that she had heard of her husband's death, for she had listened to the conversation of the nurse and myself one night, when we believed her unconscious."

"Then he was shot?"

"Yes, señorita."

"As an Insurgent?"

"Yes, señorita, they shot him with twenty others, only a few days after the señora went to Havana, and your father witnessed the execution."

"My father?"

"Yes, señorita."

"Went to see a man shot who had saved him from a burning ship, and afterward spared his life in a *duello*?" said Valita hotly.

"Yes, señorita."

"You are sure of this, Sara?"

"Yes, señorita."

"He should have saved his life, could he have done so."

Sara smiled sadly and continued her story, while Valita, deeply interested in every word, was now most eager to hear all that the old negress had to tell.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

FROM DYING LIPS.

"When the senor was able to get up, senorita," continued old Sara, "she told me that she would go away from Cuba.

"She asked me to go and see my master, Senor Cassandra, and ask him if he would let me go with her to New Orleans.

"I begged awful hard, and he felt sorry for the poor senora and said yes.

"So we went, the senora, the two children and old Sara.

"We found a little home in the outskirts of the city of New Orleans, and the senora did fancy work and made a pretty good living.

"The little boy went to school, and I took care of the house and the baby.

"About six months after we got there, I met your father one day in the street, as I was coming from market."

"In New Orleans?"

"Yes, senorita."

"Why was he there?"

"I will tell you, senorita."

"I am most anxious to learn."

"I had only seen him once or twice before, so did not recall him, but he told me who he was, and said that he had bought me from Senor Cassandra, my master."

The maiden gave a start, and her eyes drooped, while Sara continued:

"He told me that I must go back with him to Cuba, and at once.

"I asked him to let me stay, but he would not.

"Then I asked him to let me go home first," but he called a carriage and drove me down to the packet and left me on board.

"He sailed in the packet too, and took me out to the Palms Plantation.

"Soon after he married your mother, senorita, and came here to live at Villa Eden Plantation, and brought me along, for he seemed to fear I was going to run away.

"But as I seemed content he let me go one time to see my children in the Senor Cassandra's Plantation.

"That was three years ago, senorita."

"I remember your going there, Sara, and you were absent a month."

"Yes, senorita, and while I was there I learned that an aunt of the dear senorita who was my mistress, had left her a little home near Cardenas, on the coast, and a family of slaves, and I remembered she had gotten a letter from a lawyer about it, the day before your father took me from her.

"She had left New Orleans and gone there to live, and I went down there and spent a week, but I did not tell your father, senorita."

"The children were almost grown folks, for the boy had grown up as handsome as his father was, and the baby girl was almost a young lady.

"The young man had a *goleta*, which he had bought, and was supporting his mother and sister in very comfortable style, and they all seemed happy.

"But I could see that the senora was happy only for her children's sake, and she told me that the day I was taken from her your father came to the cottage and asked her to marry him and go back to Cuba."

"Oh, Sara!"

"It is true, senora, and yet he told her he would not have her children cross his threshold.

"She believed that she owed all of her sorrow to him, for her husband, when in a cell, bribed a guard to give her a letter, his last words, and it told her that your father had come to him in prison and vowed that he would marry his wife, after he had been executed."

Valita uttered no word, but bowed her head in her hands for an instant.

Then she looked up and said in a voice that was almost harsh:

"Tell me all, good Sara."

"There is little more that I have to tell, senorita, for your father did ask the senora to become his wife, and she drove him from her with a pistol.

"He fled, and she never saw him again, or had not when I was there, and it was after his going to New Orleans that he came home and married your mother.

"For some reason he seemed to feel that I knew something about him; but he has always treated me better than the other slaves, as you know."

"I do know that, Sara, and I supposed that it was because you had been such a good and faithful servant to him."

"No, senorita, it is because he feared I might tell just what I have told, for he said to me one day, after his marriage to your mother, that if I ever said a word that was evil of him, he would see that it was my last utterance.

"But now I do not fear him, as my grave is almost dug, senorita."

"But let me tell you now, that when Fidela let me know all that had happened upon the

yacht, and how that young sailor had been nearly executed as a pirate, and that your father had done nothing to save him, that it looked very bad to me, and I determined to tell you what I have done."

"But what had that to do with the very bitter implications your story holds up against my father, Sara?"

"Senorita, the young sailor is the son of the Sea Insurgent, as your father's rival was called."

Valita sprung to her feet, while she said excitedly:

"The Sea Insurgent's execution I have read of."

"His name was Kirkwood."

"Yes, senorita, Senor Angelo Kirkwood."

"Yes, and the name of the young Cuban master of the *goleta* that came so bravely to our aid, was Rebello."

"Angelo Rebello, senorita, the latter being his mother's maiden name, for she took it again after her husband's death, to keep her children from being pointed at as the son and daughter of Kirkwood, the Sea Insurgent, she told me."

"And do they not know of their father's bitter, cruel fate?"

"I think not, senorita."

"And my father knew who the young sailor was?"

"I leave it to you to decide, senorita."

"His name was Senor Angelo Rebello, his father and mother's both."

"Then he is the very image of his father, and just the age that the Sea Insurgent's son would be, as your father would know."

"As your father made no effort, Fidela said, to save him, I thought that he must know him."

"This is a cruel suspicion, Sara; but I forgive you, for you have opened my eyes, and I am glad to know all that you have told me, and I think, from Fidela's having told you that she was sure the young sailor would fall in love with me, and she hoped that I would love him, that I can fully understand your motive in telling me all the truth."

"I more than thank you, good Sara, and I will not betray you."

"I will come daily to see you, and all that I can do to make your last years happy, I will do," and almost choking with the emotion which overwhelmed her, Valita pressed the hand of the old negress and hastily left the cabin.

The next day, true to her promise, she went to see the old woman.

But good old Sara had spoken truly, her grave was almost dug, for she had quietly passed over the River of Death a few moments before Valita reached her little cabin, and the seal of the tomb was upon her lips forever.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

A KEY TO A SECRET.

POSSESSING the secret of her father's life as she did, learned from the dying lips of old Sara the negress, Valita Camblas felt that she was able to act in the future, should his revengeful feelings be still further shown against Angelo Rebello, or his mother.

From Captain Cristobal Concha she had heard a hurried story of his run down to Cardenas and rescue of Bonita Rebello and of her wondrous beauty.

She could not, under all the proofs she had, doubt one word of old Sara's story.

It had come to her from dying lips, and she felt that her father appeared in a most unamiable light.

She loved her father, and yet between them there had never been that deep feeling of affection which should ever exist between father and daughter.

Her mother she was more drawn to, and yet the two held her aloof in a certain degree.

The Senora Camblas was a woman of the world.

She idolized herself, was intelligent, cunning and determined to get the most out of life that she could.

She knew that she was not the first love of her husband, and that he had been engaged to a maiden who had discarded him for an American sailor, who afterward was executed as a Sea Insurgent.

She understood enough of her husband's nature to feel that he was not happy.

She saw that at times phantoms of the past seemed to haunt him.

But he was generous ever to her, loved her in his way, though he seemed to fear her too, and their beautiful daughter bound them together more closely.

Proud of Valita, yet neither the father or mother understood her.

Had they been different toward her in her earlier years, they would have found her as a tender vine, ready to cling about them.

The mother understood her better than her father, and saw that she was a brilliant, fearless girl, with a will of iron if moved to perform aught she set herself to accomplish, and one whose biting sarcasm it was dangerous to arouse.

Little had Valita learned of the past life of either her father or mother, and determined to find out more, after Sara's story she asked her

old nurse in her childish way, to tell her something.

The old nurse was wary, if she knew aught; but she told her that she had heard that her mother had loved a poor Spanish officer, but had been forced to give him up and marry Senor Camblas.

"Ah! there is a skeleton in the heart of each," murmured Valita to herself, and she felt that if called upon, she held the key to unlock the lives of both of her parents.

"I almost believe that father wished to see that young man executed as a pirate, to further satiate his revenge."

"But I will hold them under my eye now, and they shall suffer no more from those whose blood flows in my veins," was her determined remark, as she sat musing alone in her room the afternoon following old Sara's burial, which she had attended.

Her father had also gone, and watching his face closely, Valita thought that she detected a look of satisfaction there, that the grave was closing over one who might be able to tell strange secrets of his life.

Though yet under seventeen years of age, Valita Camblas was a woman.

A child-woman, if you will, but for all that a woman.

She seemed not like the young girls of her age.

She dressed superbly, and had a queenly air.

She was beautiful, and seemed not to know it.

Her form was perfection, and the acme of grace, yet she had no studied pose to attract admiration.

She had finished her education at the convent at the head of her class, in which she was the only girl within two years of her age.

She was the favorite of teachers and fellow-pupils, and yet with not one was she very intimate.

Generous to a fault, she never forgot the poor, and in society she seemed as pleased with the attentions of the poorest officer of inferior rank as she did to be courted by the distinguished officer of highest rank.

She was a perfect horseman, drove about at times with a pair of horses which her father dared not ride behind, and yet, enjoying such sports, took as great pleasure in her sketching, for she possessed talent as an artist, and sung divinely.

Such was my paragon of a heroine, and the reader can well understand that did her father seek still to be revengeful against the woman whom he had so dogged with his hatred, he would find a dangerous defender of his victim in his beautiful daughter.

"Had I known what old Sara told me, when Angelo Rebello was a prisoner, accused of piracy, my father would have been the one to secure his release," she said, and the determination in her face showed that she meant all that she gave utterance to.

Poor Fidela seemed almost in despair.

Sara's secret had been told and the pretty quadron, with the failing of her sex, curiosity, in a remarkable degree, had not gotten an inkling as to what it was.

But yet Fidela durst not hint to her young mistress that she would be delighted to know what Sara had told her.

Fidela knew better.

CHAPTER XXXV.

AN UNEXPECTED LOVE-TALE.

"SENORITA, here is a letter I found in the place, where you told Senor Mora to leave one, if he had any news to write about," and Fidela handed to her young mistress a sealed note, which she had discovered through her curiosity causing her to look to see if there might not be something there.

Valita seized the note somewhat eagerly.

She was not expecting any communication, for Senor Nunez Mora had done his work well, which she had asked him to do, and the young sailor Rebello was free.

Breaking the seal she read:

"May I ask an interview on Thursday afternoon at five, at the same place?"

As before there was no address, no signature, but the writing was the same, and certainly it could come from no one else than Senor Nunez Mora, the sailing-master of the yacht.

"This says Thursday, and to-day is Wednesday."

"What can he want?" said the maiden.

"I don't know, senorita," responded Fidela, and Valita laughed, while she asked:

"How could you, Fidela? But you hope to."

The next afternoon Valita was about to start for a walk, as she said, when Fidela, who was to accompany her, was called upon for certain service for the senor.

Fidela was in great distress, for she felt that she had to obey, and she knew that what she did would have to be under the eye of Senor Camblas.

But Valita could not wait, as the hour appointed was close at hand, and so she walked off alone.

She saw, as she went through the woodland,

the form of the Spanish sailing-master at the rendezvous.

He was dressed in his best uniform, and advanced to meet her with a smile.

She greeted him pleasantly, wondering at his cordial manner, and asked:

"Why have you asked me to meet you, Senor Mora?"

"Upon a matter that I consider most important, senorita."

"Indeed, has aught happened of a serious nature?" and the thought that perhaps Angelo Rebello had been rearrested flashed across her mind, in the absence of anything else to think of.

"No, Senorita Camblas, nothing has happened that need give you alarm, and I congratulate you upon your successfully freeing the young master of the *goleta* from his danger."

"I am glad that I was able to do so, senor, for I felt assured that he was not guilty of the charges against him, and more I owed him a debt of gratitude that it was my duty to repay if in my power."

"You acted from the promptings of your noble heart, Senorita Valita."

"But it was like you."

Valita looked squarely in the man's face and replied:

"Senor Mora, I came here to learn what you had to communicate, not to be complimented."

The face of the Spaniard flushed, and he seemed embarrassed, but after a moment he said:

"Senorita, I intend to make known to you that which is very near to my heart."

"Though occupying a subordinate position, as master of your father's yacht, I was born a gentleman."

"I have been thrown with you, senorita, and I love you."

"I have seen you day after day, and I have studied your noble nature, and pardon me if I presume in saying that I have thought that the kindness you have shown me, the trust you have placed in me, have indicated that my deep appreciation for you was not wholly unrequited."

"Am I not right, dear Senorita Valita, that you do care for me a little, and will give me hope to one day hear from your sweet lips that you will become my wife?"

The Spaniard had talked on, casting furtive glances on to the face of the maiden.

Her eyes were upon him with a look which he might have read, had he used his own eyes half as much as he had his tongue.

When he ceased speaking, as though acting with a certain effort at disciplined love-making, he stepped forward, with the intention of taking her hand.

But he stopped short.

She did not move, she only looked.

He read that look and cried:

"I have been too sudden in my avowal of love, Senorita."

"Rather sudden, wholly unexpected and entirely uncalled for was this avowal of love, Senor Nunez Mora."

"I certainly must guard my actions more, if aught I have done has caused you to feel that I love you."

"Even Major Rovalez, whom I am expected to marry, has never interpreted my actions and looks toward him into love, for he has only asked for my hand, not my affection, the one being above par in value, the latter to him of little worth."

"You I spoke kindly to, because I deemed you one that would not presume."

"You have presumed, and in having me meet you here, to make love to me, you have gone just so far that I shall guard against any such offense in the future, by now telling you that it is my wish that you resign your present position as master of my father's yacht, as soon as we return from the voyage we are to start on tomorrow."

"Should you decline to do this, I shall take good care that you are dismissed."

"Good-afternoon, Senor Mora."

She turned upon her heel and glided away with the dignity of a queen.

He stood gazing after her with a face like marble, and eyes that glittered like those of a basilisk.

He watched her until she disappeared within the grounds about the villa, and then slowly fell from his lips:

"Every word you uttered to me, proud beauty, you shall repent of in sackcloth and ashes, for Nunez Mora is not a man whose offer of love is to be met with insult."

"No, no, you shall rue your refusal of the affection I offer you, mark my words, and your bright eyes will be dimmed with tears, for I make no idle threat!"

Then with a muttered oath he turned, walked rapidly back into the woodland, to where his horse awaited him, and mounting, rode swiftly back to town.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

A PROPOSED PLEASURE VOYAGE.

THE cruise which Valita had spoken to Senor Murez Mora about in their meeting in the woodland, was one gotten up by Senor Camblas al-

most especially for the benefit of Major Rovalez.

He had discovered that the captain-general's words, at the dinner at the Palacio, had been meant as a punishment for the major, and he was anxious to pour oil on the troubled waters as best he could, for he had an idea that the officer had pressed the charge against Angelo Rebello as much on his account as on his own.

His wanting the *goleta* was enough to make the major secure it for him at any cost, though he knew that Rovalez also suffered on account of his wounded pride in having been disarmed by the young sailor, whose skill in the use of the sword had been gained from lessons given him by one Father Faret, a worthy priest, who had once been a swordmaster in the Italian Army, but had given up the life of a soldier for that of a padre.

The day after the dinner at the Palacio, Senor Camblas had gone to call upon the major.

He found that officer in no very pleasant humor, but he was invited in for a confidential chat.

"You heard the words of the captain-general, Senor Camblas?" said Rovalez, when the two were comfortably seated in the major's luxurious quarters, with a decanter between them.

"I did."

"Did you understand them?"

"I understood by them, senor, that the captain-general was not wholly satisfied with your statement of the case, so sent Captain Concha to investigate."

"That is so; but he he was put up to this by some one."

"Without doubt."

"Do you know whom?"

"I have an idea."

"Who, for instance, senor?"

"My daughter."

"Ah! you know this?"

"Yes."

"And the motive?"

"Not to have that young fellow die, from some romantic nonsense about his saving her life."

"She sought to save him, I admit, but where did she get the information that he was a prisoner?"

"That I do not know. Had she not found this out we would have had the fellow shot, his craft confiscated and sold to you, and his crew in prison for a year, and no one outside of a few at the castle, the captain-general, and yourself the wiser."

"It miscarried, though."

"Yes, through the Senorita Camblas finding out about the seizure of the *goleta*."

"Now, how did she find this secret out?"

"That I cannot tell you, Major Rovalez."

"Well, find it out she did, and she went to the governor-general and told her story; and she came to me, also, and we made a compact."

"Now, to carry out my pledge to her, I made up my mind to get the fellow off, but to take care that he should fall into another trap, for he is a dangerous man, Senor Camblas."

"I can well believe that, Major Rovalez."

"I really believe he is either a pirate or smuggler, and will set a watch upon him to catch him."

"Good! And I will subscribe with you to any expense that you may incur; but have you seen the captain-general since?"

"Yes; I went up to report this morning."

"And his treatment of you?"

"Was most cordial, and he made no reference to last night; but I read his meaning thoroughly."

"And what did you read?"

"That he supposed I was angry with the fellow for disarming me, in ill-humor because we could not beat off the pirates without his aid, and jealous on account of the senorita's kindness toward him, hence wished to vent my spite upon him."

"And so he wished to punish you?"

"Yes, Senor Camblas."

"I guess you read him aright, Major Rovalez; and pardon me if I say I think he read you, too."

"That I cannot deny, and I still feel revengeful; and young Rebello must suffer the consequences of having angered me, for I am not one to forgive or forget an injury."

"But there is one thing that showed how careful we must be."

"And what is that?"

"The extent to which Don Quixote went."

"In just what way?"

"I seized the log and papers of the *goleta* when I arrested Rebello, and brought them here."

"The cargo of fruit I sent to a merchant to dispose of, and the pirate booty on board, which the governor-general referred to, I sent also to a party to sell, making memoranda on the vessel's log of the names of the two salesmen."

"Now my valet suddenly disappeared, and he reports that he was seized by a military guard and taken to the castle."

"You spoke of his mysterious disappearance last night, senor?"

"Yes."

"Has he returned?"

"Yes, he returned last night, and, as I said, has been a prisoner in the castle."

"This is strange."

"Why he was taken he does not know, and I shall make no inquiries."

"But the worst was, there came some one to my quarters here, after my valet had been carried off, and then took away the *goleta's* log and papers, for I could find them nowhere."

"Last night they were found again on my desk where I had left them, and you remember the captain-general, referred to the *goleta's* log and the inventory of the piratical booty?"

"I do, senor."

"Well, the captain-general is at the bottom of it, so we must be very careful not to give him any cause for suspicion, or he may order me back to Spain."

"That would be a misfortune."

"Indeed it would, to you as well as to me, for I have friends working for me to become his successor here, when his time is up; but now that he has shown hostility against me, I shall secretly work with the powers behind the throne in Spain, to have him recalled at an early day, and myself installed as captain-general."

"A splendid idea, senor, and you can command me to aid you, but secretly of course."

"Now there is one thing I wish to ask you."

"Well, Senor Camblas?"

"I desire to take another cruise in the yacht, and it will be the same party as before, so you must join us, and do all in your power to win Valita over, as she seems a little severe on you since that affair with the Lagoon Pirates."

"I will go and ask the captain-general to allow me to carry four small guns on the yacht, and a crew of thirty men, which my sailing-master says he can ship for me."

"This will give us ample protection, and we will take another run around the island, stopping at Cardenas on our way, to see if you cannot purchase that *goleta* for me, as I am determined that no craft afloat shall be faster than mine."

"Now what say you?"

"The senor and senorita will go?"

"Gladly."

"I will be only too happy, so set your day for sailing, senor, and I will arrange accordingly."

The day was set, the Senor Camblas visited the captain general and obtained permission to put a small battery on his yacht, and Nunez Mora was given an order to increase his crew to thirty men.

And it was the day before the yacht was to start upon her voyage, that the sailing-master, Nunez Mora, met Valita in the woodland and made his avowal of love to her, which, when he was rebuked by her for so presuming, seemed to change his affection into hatred, as he made bitter threats against her, as the reader will recall.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE GOLETA'S MYSTERIOUS VOYAGE.

THE first thing that Angelo Rebello did, the morning after arriving home, was to go up to Cardenas and put his vessel in the docks for a ready overhauling.

He had already ordered a new set of sails for her, with longer spars, and they were ready for him, and the sum received from his booty prize money, enabled him to pay for them and set a full force of men at once upon the *goleta*.

As he wished to lose no time, for he had plenty of freight awaiting the transportation, he overlooked the work himself, and the result was that in a few days the Bread Winner came out looking like a new vessel from keel to truck, and as handsome as a yacht.

The Senora Rebello, whose sad history is now known to the reader, suppressed what feelings the remembrance of Marez Camblas had brought up from a past which she had hoped was forever buried, and she came out of her room the next morning with a smiling face to greet her children, and it certainly gladdened their hearts to see their mother thus happy.

As she did not refer to the conversation of the night before, and the part that Angelo had played in the attack upon the yacht of Senor Camblas, the subject was dropped as if by mutual consent, for both the young sailor and his sister felt that there was some bitter memory recalled to their mother by the mention of the Cuban planter.

Interested in looking after his vessel's refitting, Angelo was not much at home during the few days after his return, except at night, when he would seem to be pretty well tired out and retire early.

His mother, who watched him closely, felt that there was something upon his mind, which he did not make known to them, and she said one day to Bonita:

"My child, do you know what voyage Angelo is to make next?"

"No, mother."

"Has he spoken to you of any plans for the future?"

"He has not, mother, more than to say that he would have more freight to carry than ever before, and was having the Bread Widner fitted

for carrying passengers as well, while he also thought of changing her name."

"Changing her name?" asked the senora, with some surprise.

"Yes, mother?"

"Why, what will he call the *goleta*, for I think the name of Bread Winner a most appropriate one."

"She certainly has been our bread winner, mother; but Angelo spoke of calling her after me," and Bonita blushed at the honor, as though it were her lover naming his yacht after her.

"Bonita! why I will urge the change if that is his intention, and it will be a very pretty compliment to you."

"We will find out to-night, and then steal over to the town to-morrow and get her a new set of colors," said the pleased mother.

Then she returned to her former questioning, and asked:

"Why is it that Angelo is increasing his sail area, for his vessel is already the swiftest craft upon the coast?"

"I do not know, mother, unless her speed will be greatly increased by the improvements on her, and larger spread of sail, which in a year's time will allow of several more cruises, and thus bring in more money, for brother says he intends to make money fast and lay it up."

"The noble boy! he already gives us a handsome living."

The conversation thus continued about the son and brother, until he put in an appearance, rather earlier than usual, and, after kissing his mother and sister, he said, with enthusiasm:

"Oh! but you should see the *goleta* now!"

"Why, she'll be as trim as a yacht, and I guess I can get a couple of knots an hour more speed out of her, blow it hard or light."

"And you have fitted her cabin up for passengers my son, your sister says?"

"Yes, mother, for a passenger now and then pays handsomely, and when I get a reputation for quick runs, they will hunt the *goleta* up."

"But I have changed her name."

"Indeed!"

"Yes, and she is to be the Bonita, named after a sweet little girl I know," and he glanced at his sister.

"It is an honor which Bonita feels, my son, and we will have you a full set of colors by to-morrow night."

"Just what I wanted of all things, and brother, I have a notion to have a private flag of my own," and the face of the young Cuban colored, though his mother failed to observe it; but Bonita did, and wondered.

"Well, Angelo, what will you have, and shall we select the colors?"

"No, mother, for I have already thought of a design."

"What is it?"

"A field of blue and an anchor of gold in the center, encircled by a ring of silver stars."

"A beautiful design truly, Angelo; how came you to think of it, for it certainly has some significance."

"A fancy of mine, mother," was the somewhat evasive response, and Bonita noticed that there was more in the design than her brother cared to admit.

Late on the afternoon of the next day the "Bonita," as the Bread Winner had been rechristened, set sail, with Senora Rebello and Bonita on board, and ran down to an anchorage off the little home.

The behavior of the vessel in her new rig was all that could be asked, and she fairly flew along over the waters.

It was just sunset when she rounded to off the Rebello home, and all went ashore to supper, after which she would set sail, upon her voyage.

An hour after supper Angelo bade his mother and sister farewell, and a few moments after the Bonita was heading along the coast toward the open sea.

But Bonita could not sleep, and so, glass in hand, went out upon the shore and watched the little vessel.

To her surprise it came to, close inshore, and then she saw boats going to and fro from the vessel to the land.

"What can it mean?" she said in a worried manner.

"I noticed that there was very little freight on board, and I saw too that one of the boxes was half open and contained what looked like swords."

"I can't understand it, especially as the *goleta* is now anchored off that desolate point of land yonder where not a soul dwells."

"Brother Angelo has a secret which he would not even tell me, and I only pray it will bring no harm upon him—ah! there the *goleta* goes on her way," and Bonita watched the little vessel until it was out of sight, evidently bound upon some secret service which Angelo Rebello had kept a secret from those he loved most dearly.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

IN CHASE.

THE yacht Valita had sailed upon her way, bound upon another cruise around the island of Cuba.

Her owner, Senor Camblas, had supplied her with everything to make life enjoyable, and

with a battery of four guns, and a crew of thirty men, he felt that he could snap his fingers at Lagoon Pirates and other outlaws who might take a fancy to his pretty craft.

The guests had gone on board; but there were two more than the planter had anticipated, for Valita, from some whim of her own, had invited Lieutenant Mayo Garcia of the captain-general's staff, and his lovely sister, Ysbel.

The planter did not like this, but he could say nothing, for both the senora and Valita were anxious to have them go.

Senor Camblas also liked Lieutenant Garcia and Senorita Ysbel, and was too shrewd a man to show them that he preferred not to have them, so gave them welcome with apparent hearty good will.

And so the pretty yacht set sail, with Senor Camblas, wife and daughter, Lieutenant Garcia and sister and Major Rovalez, who secretly gnashed his teeth with rage at the presence on board of the young aide and Senorita Ysbel.

"Had I known this, I would have remained behind," he muttered to himself.

But Valita had taken good care that he should not know it until too late to back out, and, with some one to keep the gallant major from devoting himself wholly to her, she was glad to have him along.

And so the good yacht set sail one pleasant afternoon, with a balmy six-knot breeze to waft her on her way.

Several hours after nightfall a horseman dashed up to the Palacio.

His horse showed hard riding, and the rider handed a letter to Captain Concha who was just entering the mansion.

It was addressed to the governor-general, and the young officer at once took it in to him.

"An important communication I think, Senor General," said Cristobal Concha.

"Read it, Senor Cristobal," replied the governor, looking up from a paper that he was glancing over.

The officer broke the seal and read:

"SENOR ECCCELLENZA:—

"From the plantation where I am visiting, I recognized the yacht of Senor Camblas standing along the coast just at sunset."

"Her decks seemed crowded with men, and just after nightfall shots were heard on board and loud cries of men, with also screams in the voices of women."

"By the flashes of the firearms I saw that a hand-to-hand fight was going on upon her decks."

"But it did not last long, and the yacht, changing her course, stood out to sea, heading north-north-east."

"I at once ordered a man to mount and bear you this letter with all haste."

"With distinguished consideration,

"I am your Eccellenza's servant,

"CALIMETE,

"Captain Spanish Guards."

The captain-general and Cristobal Concha looked at each other an instant in amazement.

Then the former said:

"What does it mean, Senor Concha?"

"I cannot tell, Senor Eccellenza; but should I not take your yacht and go in chase at once, for there are ladies on the yacht, as you know?"

"By all means, and at once, my brave Concha."

"The Camblas yacht is armed now, as you know, and carries some thirty men; but my little Sea Pearl is a match for her, though you had better throw on board a dozen marines."

"I will go at once, Eccellenza," and without more ado the young officer hastened from the Palacio.

Sending a mounted orderly to the shore, to order the yacht gotten ready with all dispatch, and another to command the extra marines to go on board, Cristobal Concha sprung into a *volante* and drove to his quarters.

There he made a hasty toilet, grasped a handbag and hastened down to the pier.

A boat soon placed him on the deck of the pretty yacht, Sea Pearl, which was all ready for sea, and an hour after the arrival of the courier with the news of the mysterious happening on the deck of the Valita, the fleet craft was gliding along under the frowning walls of El Moro in her chase of the yacht of Senor Camblas.

The Sea Pearl was a fast sailer, the captain-general arguing far faster than the Valita, while Senor Camblas was willing to wager a large sum upon his yacht in a race against her rival, and those who knew both vessels were inclined to believe that the planter would win.

Be that as it may, the Sea Pearl flew out of the harbor of Havana under a tremendous pressure of canvas, and at a pace that seemed to show a human interest in the reason for her going, and certainly she dropped astern several fleet-sailing vessels that were also heading seaward.

She had a battery of six light guns, and a crew of forty men, which had now been increased by the dozen marines, which would make her superior to the Valita and her crew in an engagement.

As she flew along, and the lights of Havana had been dropped out of sight astern, the keen eye of Cristobal Concha suddenly caught sight of a vessel out upon the dark waters, lying under bare poles.

A glance of a minute convinced him that it

was a *goleta*, and he handed his glass to the captain of the Sea Pearl.

"I think, Senor Concha, that it is the Valita, lying under bare poles to escape observation."

"I will head at once for her," said Captain Toriente of the Sea Pearl.

The course of the Sea Pearl was then changed a couple of points, and the crew called to the guns to be ready for work.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

A SUSPICIOUS CIRCUMSTANCE.

As the yacht of the captain-general neared the vessel lying so dark and still upon the sea, no sign of life was visible on board, as was expected, by those on the Sea Pearl, would be shown.

There was no setting of sails quickly, no flashing of lights, nor any firing upon them, as some expected.

On swept the Sea Pearl over the dark waters, until but a short distance separated the two vessels.

Still the stranger remained motionless, except for the movement of the waters.

In a few moments more Captain Toriente said:

"It must be the Valita—I will hail."

Then out over the waters rung his hail:

"Ho, the *goleta*!"

"Ay, ay, senor," promptly came the answer in Spanish.

"What craft is that?"

"The Bonita, from Cardenas, senor."

"What are you doing lying out here under bare poles, hiding?"

"I am hiding, senor, and hoped to escape your observation," was the frank response.

"Have you seen a vessel pass to the northward?"

"Ay, ay, senor, the yacht Valita, as near as I could make her out, passed to the northward some hours ago."

"Ay, ay, come on board."

"Ay, ay, senor."

The Sea Pearl had now swept up into the wind, and but a cable's length divided the two vessels.

The stranger soon launched a boat and it came toward the Sea Pearl, and a few moments after the occupant sprung upon the yachts' deck.

"You are Senor Rebello!" cried Captain Concha, before Captain Toriente could utter a word.

"I am, Senor Captain Concha, for I recognize you now, senor," replied Angelo.

"You said that your vessel was the Bonita?" and just the shadow of a suspicion crossed the mind of Captain Concha, that all was not right.

"Yes, Senor Captain, I had her overhauled and refitted with sails, and have named her after my sister, whom I now know you so nobly rescued from the Lagoon Pirates, and I beg you will accept my deepest gratitude."

"Do not speak of my service, Senor Rebello, for I only did my duty, accident placing me in a position where I was able to aid your sister."

"But, may I ask why we find you here?"

"I am on secret service, senor, and was lying under bare poles, watching a craft that lies inshore."

In a few days I hope to make a report of just what I am doing; but now I cannot."

"What craft lies inshore?" asked Captain Toriente, somewhat sharply.

"I do not know, senor, what she is; but I hope to find out."

"I will be responsible for Senor Rebello, Captain Toriente," said Cristobal Concha, and he only hoped that he was not saying too much in making the assertion.

"I thank you, Captain Concha," said Angelo Rebello, while Captain Toriente quickly responded:

"I accept your guarantee, senor, so now let us find out about the Valita."

"You say that the yacht of Senor Camblas passed you some hours ago?" and he addressed Angelo Rebello.

"Yes, Senor Captain, I ran in here after nightfall and lay to, stripping my *goleta* to bare poles."

"Soon after a vessel came swiftly along from inshore, and under all the canvas she could carry, and I recognized the *goleta* yacht of Senor Camblas."

"She passed within three-quarters of a mile of me, but evidently did not see my vessel, and her course lay north-northeast from here."

"About what speed was she making?"

"Some five knots then, but the wind has increased since."

"Just at what time did you see her?"

"At two bells, senor."

"And it is now nearly four bells—about two hours ago?"

"Nearly that, senor."

"That would give her a lead, allowing for increase of wind, of something under twenty miles?"

"Yes, senor."

"Then we must be off at once."

"One moment, Toriente," and turning to Angelo, Captain Concha continued:

"Senor Rebello, we are in chase of Senor Camblas's yacht, on account of word coming that an officer of the Guards, visiting at a plantation on the coast, had seen, just after night-fall, a fight upon the little craft, heard cries, screams and shots, and the vessel had afterward changed her course and stood in this direction."

"Oh, senor! I trust that no harm has befallen the—the—senor and his family, who are doubtless on board," and Angelo Rebello came very nearly saying "the senorita," but changed it.

He spoke with considerable excitement, which seemed foreign to his nature, and the young captain noticed it.

"We only know the facts as stated, and knowing that your craft has outsailed the yacht, I only wished that she was armed, that—"

"Captain Concha, the capture of the yacht is far more important than the object that holds me here, and I will at once start in chase."

"But your crew will not permit of—"

"I have over a score of men on board, senor, fortunately, and a couple of small guns that will be useful, and so will start at once."

Again that shadow of suspicion against the youth fell upon the heart of Captain Concha.

But dismissing the circumstance of the *goleta* lying there in hiding, being armed, and having a large crew on board, he said, quickly:

"Do so, Senor Rebello, and between your fleet *goleta* and the Sea Pearl, we shall certainly catch the yacht and know what has happened on board of her."

With a hearty farewell Angelo Rebello sprang into his boat, and at once rung out his voice:

"Ho, the Bonita!"

"Ay, senor!" came response from on board the little vessel.

"Get up sail with all haste, and set everything."

"Ay, senor."

Before Angelo Rebello reached the side of the *goleta* sail was set, and very soon after the little boat hung at the davits, and the fleet craft went flying away in the wake of the Sea Pearl, which was one mass of canvas, and rushing swiftly through the water under the increasing breeze.

CHAPTER XL.

THE SEA RACE.

It was an object of deep interest to both officers and crew of the yacht of the captain-general to see how the *goleta* would sail in company with the Sea Pearl.

There were a few among the seamen who had heard of the *goleta* as a very fast flyer, and Captain Concha knew that she had overhauled the yacht of the Senor Camblas, in her race along the coast, at the time of the attack by the Lagoon Pirates.

All on the yacht then had spoken of the speed of the *goleta*, and the captain remembered that Senor Camblas had been anxious to purchase her, for he was determined to have a craft which no other could beat.

His suspicions, that would flash into his mind against Angelo Rebello, he kept to himself, and entered into the spirit of the race with real pleasure, as did Senor Toriente.

The young commander of the Sea Pearl had great faith in his vessel.

He had seen her walk past many a crack sailer, from a frigate to a small *goleta*, and he deemed her the swiftest vessel in Cuban waters.

He was glad to get a chance to try her mettle in chase of the yacht of Senor Camblas, and the idea of a coaster beating his beautiful vessel he did not entertain for an instant.

But he said, as the Sea Pearl swung off on her course once more:

"That seems to be a fine spoken young fellow, Concha."

"Quite a gentleman, in fact."

"He is a gentleman, Senor Camblas, for he was born one, and his mother is a lady."

"You know them, then?"

"Yes, as you heard him say, I saved his sister from being kidnapped, when I went to Cardenas a short while since on this very yacht, while you were absent on a visit to your brother's plantation."

"Ah yes, my officers told me of it, I remember now, and one of them who saw the senorita, said that she was very beautiful."

"She is the most lovely woman of my acquaintance."

"Barring the Senorita Valita?"

"No, I bar no one, even as lovely as is the Senorita Camblas, and I felt myself fortunate in saving her."

"Even if you lost my best coxswain, eh?"

"I regret that; but we all took chances together."

"Yes, my dear Concha, and but for you the two seamen would have drowned, for I heard all about it, though only to-day upon my return to the vessel."

"But that young man handles a boat well. See! his sails are set, and she is already after us!"

"Yes; he is a perfect sailor, I guess."

"Now we will show him, though, that he is astern of the Sea Pearl."

"You expect to keep him there?"

"Of course, for the *goleta* is not built that can lead the Sea Pearl in a fair race."

"He comes on rapidly, though."

"*Caramba!* but he does, and just see the spread of canvas he carries!"

"He has new canvas, I see, for what the *goleta* had on, when I saw her last, were old sails."

"His tonnage is hardly as much as mine?"

"No; less, I think."

"But he spreads more canvas—why, the craft can't stand it in this wind, increasing as it is."

"She stands up pretty well, however."

"So she does."

"Her angle is not as great as the Sea Pearl's."

"By Jupiter! but you are right, and—ye gods of war! *she is gaining!*"

The words of the captain rung through his ship, and every man heard them.

The eyes of every man, too, were upon the vessel astern, except the one at the tiller, and he was coursing his ship carefully.

That the Bonita was gaining very soon became evident.

Even in the increasing wind Captain Toriente ordered one more piece of canvas set, and the Sea Pearl was carrying all she could stagger under.

She seemed to fairly fly along, so great was her speed.

It was blowing strong, and yet the sea was not rough, though white caps were frequent.

The Sea Pearl was making ten knots readily, and yet her pace did not suit her captain.

Had not the Bonita been astern, he would have thought that her speed could not be increased.

But the Bonita was astern, and creeping up.

Two of the best quartermasters on the yacht were now placed at the wheel, and the lee guns were hauled to windward, where the entire crew now took their positions to place her upon a more level keel.

Then the captain ordered water thrown on the sails, the halyards hauled in on, to trim the canvas flatter, for the wind was pretty nearly ahead.

Then all stood in silence, watching the result.

"She gains!" cried Captain Concha, excitedly.

"She still gains," came in wondering accents from Captain Toriente.

But he could do no more.

The Sea Pearl was doing her best, and she had just the wind that favored her most.

"Log her speed," called out the captain, and all breathlessly awaited the result.

"Twelve knots, senor!"

A cheer came from the crew, and the increasing wind showed that she was soon logging more.

"Again get her speed," the captain commanded, and—

"Thirteen knots!" was the cry.

But the *goleta*?

There she hung, like a hound upon the trail, and directly in the wake of the Sea Pearl.

But, the Sea Pearl's quarter of a mile start, the Bonita had cut down to less than a cable's length.

And she was still gaining.

"That craft is a wonder, Senor Captain Concha."

"She is indeed, Toriente, and it looks as if I should have gone on board the Bonita, if I expected to be in at the capture of the chase."

"It does look so, Concha, upon my life, it does."

"But I hope he will not pass me."

"He is sure to."

"And to windward?"

"No, he'll not do that, I am sure, for you'll find him courteous."

"I don't believe he can go by to leeward, if he comes near enough for me to blanket him."

"We shall see, senor."

"But what a cloud of canvas for a small craft."

"Is there not?"

"And that craft is a coaster, you say?"

"Yes, Toriente."

"I wish the captain-general would trade boats with Senor Rebello," ruefully said Captain Toriente.

Captain Concha laughed, and then all stood watching the beautiful *goleta*.

She was standing up better under her canvas, by an angle of several degrees, than was the Sea Pearl, that was certain.

She was spreading, too, more square feet of canvas than did the yacht, while her hull was a tenth less tonnage.

Her men were now plainly visible, and they were not to windward, nor were two guns, fore and aft, now visible upon her decks.

One man was at the wheel and it was Angelo Rebello, and he had seen no reason to dampen his sails.

Nearer and nearer came the Bonita, until her long, rudder-like bowsprit was almost over the stern of the Sea Pearl.

Then, as it seemed it must spear the mainsail of the yacht, she fell aft just enough to pass her by to leeward.

"I thank you, Senor Rebello, for not going to

windward," said Captain Toriente, raising his cap.

Rebello returned the salute, and said:

"I would not blanket you, senor, while I believe I can send the Bonita by to leeward."

"You have a wonderful craft, surely."

"Yes, she is speedy; but this is her worst point of sailing, senor."

"Indeed?"

"Yes, senor; with the wind abeam, or astern she goes like a race-horse—keep steady as you are, for I'll not touch you," called out Angelo Rebello, as the helmsmen of the Sea Pearl seemed to fear that he would.

"Steady as you are, men," cried Captain Toriente, with perfect confidence in the young sailor who commanded the destinies of the *goleta*.

The Bonita's bow was now up with the stern of the Sea Pearl, and though her speed slightly slackened, when she got fully under the lee, or was "blanketed" in sea parlance, by the yacht's sails, she still crept on.

In ten minutes she had shaken herself loose from the yacht, Captain Toriente and Cristobal Concha walking away as she passed, to the bows of the Sea Pearl, and watching her easy movement.

"A wonderful vessel," said Captain Concha.

"Yes, and a wonderful young commander—he handles her as a jockey would a race-horse—hal! we must take in some of our sail, for we are carrying too much for safety—Hal!"

"Ho the Sea Pearl! yonder is an ugly wind-cloud!" came back from the Bonita, in the voice of Angelo Rebello.

"Thanks, Senor Rebello," shouted back Captain Toriente, and he turned to Cristobal Concha and said:

"Senor, a gallant fellow that, for his warning was timely, and in spite of handling his craft in such a masterly manner, he sees danger ahead."

"Ho, lads! down with her topsails!"

The topsails were quickly taken in, but it was seen that the Bonita held on to hers for awhile longer, and then they were taken in with a quickness that surprised even the well-trained crew of the Sea Pearl, and which won words of admiration from all on the yacht.

CHAPTER XLI.

PIRATE, OR—

THE wind-cloud which Angelo Rebello had called the attention of Captain Toriente to, was an ugly one, and just in time did the two pretty vessels take in their light sails, for it came with a rush upon them.

For a few minutes, in the flying spray and darkness, the Bonita was lost to the view of those upon the Sea Pearl, but when again seen, after the squall had passed over, she was discovered a mile ahead and driving furiously along.

The sea was rising steadily, and Captain Toriente felt that he would have all he could do to carry his lower sails unreefed, and he could not but feel chagrined that the Bonita was also proving herself a better sea-boat than was the Sea Pearl, and Captain Concha had a deep sense of regret that he had not gone on board the *goleta*.

"But who would have thought that she could walk away from the captain-general's crack yacht, in that style?" he muttered, as he turned his glass upon the fast receding *goleta*.

After the squall the wind switched round, so as to be more on the beam, and the Bonita seemed to verify her young skipper's words, for she was soon very nearly out of sight.

Presently Captain Toriente came from forward, and walking up to Cristobal Concha, said:

"Senor, I have heard something that I do not like."

"Well, Toriente, out with it."

"One of my officers tells me that the young skipper of yonder craft was in the Castle El Moro a short time ago, accused of piracy."

"It is true, Senor Captain."

"He says what is news to me, for you know I have been back in the interior the month past, and only returned this morning, that the Senor Rebello saved the yacht of Senor Camblas from capture by the Lagoon Pirates, and that he was found to have a pirate crew on board himself."

"It is true, senor."

"And more, that he was most impertinent to Major Rovalez, disarmed him, and after landing his pirate crew at Key West, boldly entered the port of Havana."

"He certainly did, and Rovalez had his vessel seized, the crew put in prison and Rebello sentenced to death as a pirate."

"And rightly so, if he was a pirate."

"If he was, or is, yes; but the captain-general had certain influence brought to bear upon him in favor of Rebello, and believing that Rovalez was acting with too great haste, he put off the day appointed for execution, and sent me to Cardenas to learn what I could of the young senor."

"It was there that I went in your yacht, and was so fortunate as to save the wife of the Senorita Rebello."

"And your discovery?"

"That the charge was certainly false, and the story true, as to his finding the pirates on a wreck at sea, was going to land them, as he felt he had no right to hold them, taken in distress as they were, and at that time put them to good service in rescuing Senor Camblas and his party from sure death."

"But the pirates?"

"Major Rovalez, I believe, sought to reward young Rebello, who refused with indignation, and then the major claimed the pirate crew as Government prisoners, and the skipper would not give them up, and thus the scene, as I understood it."

"And he disarmed Major Rovalez, the best swordsman in Cuba?"

"So it seems, Toriente."

"And then?"

"Well, he landed his shipwrecked prisoners at Key West and ran to Havana."

"That he would have been hanged there is no doubt, but for the pressure brought upon Don Quixote to investigate."

"And he was pardoned?"

"He was set free, senor."

"And now he is afloat with an armed craft, by his own confession, a new set of sails, thirty in crew, and we found him hiding!"

"I confess I do not understand this, Toriente, but I believe it will turn out all right."

"It looks piratical."

"It does have a bad look I am fain to admit."

"My officer suggests that he offered to go after the yacht simply to escape, and also to get a chance to try his vessel's speed with the Sea Pearl, for future use."

"I cannot believe it, but the daylight will show if he is flying or in chase of the Valita, which I believe he is, for he has reason to wish to save those on board from harm, if harm has befallen them, as I fear there has."

"Well, I am very sorry I did not capture the *goleta*, and with the suspicion that has been aroused in my mind, if I could, I would seize the craft now, and risk Senor Rebello proving himself not to be a pirate."

"It is too late now, Senor Toriente."

"Yes, too late, be he pirate or—"

"Or what, Captain Toriente?"

"Honest man," was the reply of the Spanish commander of the Sea Pearl.

CHAPTER XLII.

A RUNNING FIGHT.

FOR a few hours, before the break of dawn, Captain Concha and the commander of the Sea Pearl got some sleep.

But with the break of day they were on deck, watching for what the sunlight might reveal.

The sky was clear, the wind blowing fresh, the sea a trifle rough, and the yacht was bowling along at a ten-knot pace, having again set her topsails.

She had held on in the same course which she had started upon to overhaul the Valita, and at the terrible pace at which she had been driven through the night, it was hoped that she had come in sight of the fugitive craft, which, hardly expecting pursuit, would not have crowded on full sail in that stiff breeze.

So every eye was looking ahead, to see what the light would reveal.

They were not only anxious to sight the yacht of Senor Camblas, but to discover whether the Bonita had taken advantage of the darkness to make her escape.

Suddenly a perfect chorus of voices cried out:

"There's the Bonita!"

And there the Bonita was, still under a cloud of canvas and driving along in splendid style.

She was fully five miles ahead of the Sea Pearl, and holding the same course.

Then there came another cry, as a slight movement of the yacht revealed another craft dead ahead of the Bonita.

"The yacht! The yacht!"

Such was the cry from all.

There she was, not more than half a mile ahead of the Bonita, and under easy sail.

But as they looked, the canvas began to suddenly cover the yacht, as though the pursuers were just discovered, and in a short while she went flying along.

The order was at once given to fire a gun, and then to signal, holding off so that the Sea Pearl could be seen.

Both were done, but it seemed only to increase the desire of those on board the Valita to get away faster.

"There is something wrong on the yacht, surely," said Captain Toriente, and he seemed anxious.

"Without doubt, senor."

"See, they are just covering her with canvas."

"Yes, they are putting on all the canvas that she can carry, and she reels badly under it," answered Captain Concha, who was a very fair sailor.

"Yes, she does not stand up under it as the Bonita does."

"Nor as well as the Sea Pearl."

"No; but I am glad to see that our young skipper has not run off."

"It does not look like he was guilty."

"No, it does not look that way; but wait and see."

"We will see now if he can creep up to the yacht as he did upon us."

"Yes, and we will soon know if the yacht is to be captured."

Breakfast was now served in the cabin, and before going to it, the two officers took a long look at each yacht, that they might mark the result upon their return.

In half an hour they were again on deck, and after a close scrutiny, Captain Toriente said:

"The Bonita has dropped us rapidly, for she is carrying all of her canvas in spite of the stiff breeze."

"Yes, senor, and the Valita is also leaving us."

"You are right, she has gained upon us, Concha."

"But the Bonita has gained upon the chase."

"Again you are right."

"I am glad that the Bonita came, for the Sea Pearl would never have caught the Valita, Captain Toriente."

"Not at this rate, certainly," said the disappointed captain, and he gave orders to see what the Sea Pearl was logging.

"Twelve knots, Senor Captain," came the reply.

"Then the Valita is logging thirteen."

"Yes, and the Bonita fourteen."

"At that rate she will overhaul her within several hours; but why does he not fire a shot at her?"

No one knew, and in a moment more there came a puff of smoke from the stern of the yacht and shot was seen to strike near the Bonita.

Again a shot came, yet did no damage, and still the young captain of the Bonita did not return the fire, though it could be seen that he had a pivot gun mounted forward.

"Why does he not fire?" impatiently said Captain Toriente.

"I think I know the reason, senor?"

"Well, Concha?"

"He knows that that there are ladies on board the yacht."

"By Neptune! I would not have thought of that, and fired, had I been in range."

"But the fire of the yacht may cut down his spars."

"He is willing to take those chances."

"They are keeping up a steady fire now."

"Yes, yet their aim is bad fortunately; but they may improve, and the running fight may yet turn out in favor of the fugitive yacht."

And on the three vessels swept, but it became evident to all that though the Bonita gained steadily upon the yacht, the Sea Pearl was cut off the chase, and Captain Concha said dolefully:

"I am glad I have found out that the Sea Pearl can be beaten, before we reach Senor Camblas for the snug little sum he suggested to the captain-general, for I meant to wager a few months pay myself, and I could ill afford to lose it."

"Well, they are three wonderfully fleet vessels, but the coaster out-sails the pleasure craft, where certainly it was not expected," remarked Captain Concha, and he watched the chase with the deepest of interest, for he saw that the aim of the yacht's gunners was improving, as several times he had sent a shot through the sails or into the hull of the Bonita, though without in the slightest degree checking her speed it seemed.

"If he will dare stand the fire, and his craft is not fatally hit, Senor Rebello may yet overhaul her, though whether he can capture her alone is another thing," Captain Toriente remarked.

"He will dare anything, Angelo Rebello will, or his looks belie him, and I have little doubt but that he will take the yacht, if the *goleta* is not crippled by her fire."

"We shall see; but he stands it bravely without hitting back, when he has the means of doing so," was the response of Cristabel Concha, and then in silence the two officers stood watching the chase, feeling deeply their inability to be participants with more credit to themselves.

And so thought the Spanish crew, as they watched the two vessels and openly admired the splendid sailing qualities of the Bonita and the masterly manner in which she was handled by her young skipper.

CHAPTER XLIII.

TREACHERY.

WHEN the pretty yacht Valita sailed out of the harbor of Havana, not one of those in the cabin dreaded any evil, but anticipated a most delightful cruise.

Senor Camblas was most attentive to his guests, as was his wont, and his wife and daughter joined him in his good work of making all happy.

Major Rovalez got over his ill-humor at not having the chance to be all alone with Valita, and made up his mind to convince the maiden that she had misunderstood him in some things.

As for Lieutenant Garcia and his pretty sister Ysbel, they were delighted with the prospect of

a cruise in the beautiful yacht and with such charming friends.

Valita had returned the polite salute of Senor Nunez Mora as though she had no cause of ill-will toward him, and yet there was that in her face that proved to him she had not forgotten it.

The crew of the craft sprung nimbly to work, and were a smart-looking lot in their new sailor suits.

And so all promised for a charming time.

The guns shone like gold, and Senor Camblas felt very proud of them, and in gazing upon his large crew seemed to be filled with the pride of an admiral on a line-of-battle ship.

The wind was balmy and not strong, so that supper was had on deck, after which the party located themselves about upon the divans and easy-chairs for a pleasant evening.

The gentlemen smoked and chatted merrily, pointing out bits of lovely scenery to the ladies as they went along the coast, and not one dreamed that a shadow deeper than the shades of night was coming upon them.

The sun went down, twilight followed, and then darkness settled upon the sea.

The wind promised to freshen a little as night came on, and the sea was gorgeous in the last rays of the sunset glories.

As darkness began to creep over the sea, and the light along the shore, nearly a league away, twinkled amid the dark outline of the coast, Major Rovalez suggested a song, and getting her guitar, Valita's lovely voice burst forth in some ballad, in which Ysbel Garcia, her brother, and the major joined in the chorus.

Valita was seated near the cabin companionway, and suddenly she heard a whisper almost in her ear.

She turned and saw Fidela.

At her request Major Rovalez was singing a Spanish love song, and all were attentively listening, while he accompanied himself upon the guitar.

"What is it, Fidela?" asked Valita in a low whisper, feeling assured that the quadroom would not disturb her without some good cause.

"Senorita, do not move, do not get excited; but I overheard Senor Nunez Mora come and call two of the men, who were below, and tell them to come on deck, for he would at once seize the yacht, but first to secure the arms in the cabin."

"I let them see me a moment after, and then went back, and I have now all the weapons here in the companionway, and have closed the gangway."

Valita did not cry out, as many would have done, at this startling information.

She knew that Nunez Mora meant to keep his threat made to her.

Who were true among the crew she could not tell, but the negro cook and two stewards doubtless were.

But they were lying amidships, listening to the music.

Besides them, there were only her father, Major Rovalez and Lieutenant Garcia to defend the yacht against thirty men, should all prove treacherous.

Like a flash these ideas went through her head, and then she said in a low tone as Major Rovalez ceased his song, somewhat hurt to see that Valita was not listening to him, but talking to her maid:

"Do not be alarmed, and show no excitement, but, Major Rovalez, Fidela has just overheard a plot that Senor Mora had formed to seize the yacht."

"She has closed the gangway and has your weapons here by her."

"What shall we do?"

Not a cry came, as might have been expected from the senora and Senorita Garcia.

They seemed all struck dumb with what they heard.

But Major Rovalez at once showed his nerve, by saying:

"Senora Camblas, it seems damp on deck, so I advise you and the senoritas to go into the cabin, where we will follow you when we have finished our cigars."

"It is chilly, Major Rovalez, and I thank you for the suggestion."

"Come, mother, come, Ysbel," said Valita, seeing that her mother did not reply or move, and she led the way to the cabin.

"I'll get a heavier coat," said Senor Camblas, and he followed the ladies with considerable alacrity.

"Now, Garcia, what is to be done?" and Major Rovalez managed to get near the companionway and seize his weapons, held up to him by Valita, who then gave Lieutenant Garcia his, while she said:

"There are more here, and we can use them, if need be."

Then she called out in a loud voice:

"Major Rovalez, please send Pedro here to get orders for breakfast."

"Ho, Pedro, the Senorita Valita wishes you," calmly called out the major and as the negro cook approached, he said:

"Call your two companions."

Pedro did so, and while he went into the cabin the other two negroes, at the command of

Major Rovalez began to gather up the divans and chairs to carry below, which was an excuse for them to enter the cabin.

In an instant Valita had asked:

"Pedro, do you know aught of this intended mutiny?"

"Oh, senorita!" and the negro's face showed his truth.

"And Polo and Jaquez?"

"They are here, senorita," and the steward on the yacht, entered with their arms full of the things they had brought from on deck.

"Pedro, I wish you, Polo and Jaquez to understand that the crew are going to seize the yacht, perhaps murder us, so you must take those weapons and be ready to go on deck at the call of Major Rovalez."

The negroes were alarmed, but yet they were brave and could be depended upon.

"Come, father, Major Rovalez and Lieutenant Garcia are on deck alone," said Valita.

"I am getting my weapons, child," said the Senor Camblas tartly, but he was without doubt the one who suffered most with fear of all his party.

Just then there came in loud tones:

"Now, men, come aft! Senor Rovalez, you and Senor Garcia are my prisoners."

"Resist and it will be the worst for you."

"It is the voice of Nunez Mora," cried Valita, and as she spoke came the stern command of Major Rovalez:

"Back, Senor Traitor, with your coward mutineers!"

As he spoke the major fired his pistol full in the face of the crew, and at once followed the reports of the weapons of Lieutenant Garcia.

CHAPTER XLIV.

AN OUTLAW LOVER.

THE shots of the two Spanish officers had not been thrown away, for one of the mutineers fell dead and another was wounded.

But Nunez Mora had the whole crew at his back, and they made a rush upon the brave defenders of the yacht.

Up from the cabin bounded the three negroes, and behind them, urged by the scornful words of Valita, Senor Camblas went.

Then followed a dozen shots hastily fired, stern orders, the thud of falling steel, as the swords of the officers were brought down upon their foes, a trampling of feet, and the words of Nunez Mora:

"We have won! I command here!"

Senora Camblas screamed and almost went into hysterics. Ysbel Garcia was silent, while Valita sprung upon deck and confronted the mutineers.

"This is your work, Senor Nunez Mora," she cried in a voice that held no fear.

"It is, senorita."

"I told you I was not one to cast off idly."

She looked over the decks.

Major Rovalez, Lieutenant Garcia and her father were unharmed, but they were in irons.

The three negroes had not been considered dangerous enough to put in chains, after the others were secured, and stood silently by, having been deprived of their weapons.

Nunez Mora occupied a commanding position in front of his men, who were ready to do his slightest bidding, and upon the decks were several dead men, and others had been wounded.

The mutineers had not won a bloodless victory by any means, and yet it was evident, as they were not armed, that they had strict orders to take no life.

"And what is your purpose, Senor Mora?" asked Valita in the same fearless tones.

"My first purpose is to get this yacht under way again, and change her course as I wish," was the reply.

Then turning to one of his men he told him to take the tiller, for Senor Camblas had been amusing himself with steering, at the time of the alarm by Fidela, and Lieutenant Garcia had taken his place when the planter had so hastily followed the ladies into the cabin.

The seaman obeyed, and the others going to their posts, the yacht was at once gotten under way and headed in a north-northeast course.

The dead were coolly thrown overboard, by an order of Mora, and the wounded carried forward, while the Senor Camblas and the two officers were placed upon settees, and made fast to them.

The senora, calmed by the example of Ysbel Garcia, now came on deck, accompanied by the maiden, and joined Valita, while Fidela, trembling with fear, stood in the companionway.

Not once had the proud bearing of Valita deserted her.

She had watched the mutineers pitch their dead comrades into the sea, had coolly followed their movements with her eyes, and when Nunez Mora had the yacht once more in good trim and on her way, she again asked:

"And now your purpose, Senor Mutineer?"

"I will tell you, Senorita Valita, in very few words," was the reply.

"Well, let us know our fate."

"I will begin, senorita, by telling you I was born a gentleman—"

"Your actions belie your birth," was the retort of Valita.

Unheeding her words, he continued:

"Circumstances, over which I had no control, made me become a wanderer, and I went to the bad, I must admit."

"One day while in Havana I saw you, and I loved you, Senorita Camblas, and I at once determined to reform and try to win you."

"I was in hard luck then, for a slaver, of which I had been mate, had been wrecked, and I lost a fortune in her, for all I had in the world was upon her."

"I learned who you were, and that your father wished a sailing-master for his yacht."

"I applied and got the berth."

"The more I saw of you, the more I loved you, and I regretted that I was not worthy of you."

"Why must we listen to this story of yours, Senor Mora?"

"It certainly is not a pleasant one to hear?" said Valita.

"It may prove more pleasant than what else I have to say, and I desire to answer your question as to my purpose in securing this vessel for myself."

"Pray go on, senor," sneered the daring girl.

"I had the idea that you read my love for you in my eyes, and when you asked me to help you to save the young sailor, whom Major Rovalez and Senor Camblas seemed so anxious to hang for some reason, I gladly served you."

"As you trusted me in that delicate affair, I felt that you cared something for me, and so it was that I made bold to tell you of my love."

"Instead of bidding me hope, you scorned me with bitter words, and drove me from you."

"You told me that I must give up my position as master upon your father's yacht as soon as we had returned from this cruise."

"Is not this so, Senorita Camblas?"

"It is."

"I could not bear the idea of giving you up, and to yield my command here was to do so."

"I had urged your father to get a permit to arm his vessel and ship a crew of thirty men."

"I played upon his timid nature, and he was glad to assent, and I got the order to arm the yacht and ship additional men."

"Every man on board served with me in the African slave schooner of which I spoke, and were glad to ship under me."

"I determined to seize the yacht, but to take no life."

"Major Rovalez is rich, and will pay a big ransom for his release."

"The same may be said of Lieutenant Garcia, who will also have to pay a large sum for his sister's freedom."

"Your father must come down handsomely, for I will put his price at what he considers his value, and then there is the senora, who likewise is worth a large sum in ransom-money."

"The three negro men, and your maid, must be paid for at their market value."

"All then can go, when I receive the gold in full I demand, and then, senorita, you are to become my wife, and we will sail in the yacht for another land, and all in my power that I can do shall be done to make you happy."

"If you refuse, then I shall put your father and mother to death."

"Now, Senorita Valita, you know my purpose in seizing the yacht."

A deathlike stillness rested upon all at the conclusion of the words of Nunez Mora.

Only the wash of the water against the yacht's side, broke the stillness.

Then, with a low moan, Senora Camblas sunk to the deck, while Senor Camblas was dazed with terror too great for speech or movement.

CHAPTER XLV.

ONE DAY'S GRACE.

"You accursed villain! was man ever so base as you are?"

The words were uttered by Major Rovalez.

They brought only a laugh from Nunez Mora.

But they broke that appalling, silent spell, and with a long-drawn breath Valita Camblas seemed to regain command of herself, for she had seemed stunned.

Her mother had not swooned, but merely sunk to the deck, her limbs having no power to sustain her.

Ysbel Garcia had sprung to her side, and Fidela was there with her bottle of smelling salts.

The planter had tottered back to the taffrail and there supported himself, but he had not the power of speech.

Major Rovalez and his brother officer were powerless, and the three negroes stood aloof completely awed.

The man at the wheel seemed wholly wrapped up in his duties, the crew were amidsthips, but watchful for the slightest call of their desperate leader, who stood, with folded arms, looking upon Valita, as though to fascinate her with his ardent gaze.

It was a strange scene, and one that was appalling in its peril and intensity.

Upright, fearless in mien, whatever she might feel, Valita faced the villain who had spoken to her of his purpose in seizing the yacht.

It seemed to her in that awful moment that there was not one atom of hope for her.

Somehow, girl though she was, all the others seemed to turn to her.

Where it would be natural did she faint, or go into hysterics, her mighty nerve sustained her, and her fearless gaze almost cowed the man who had offered her such terms for the freedom of others.

Why she did not break down no one could tell.

The strain upon her was fearful, that all knew, and yet she stood facing the guilty wretch, as though she held not the slightest fear of him.

"You have told your base story of your base life, you have declared your vile purpose in seizing this yacht, Nunez Mora, and all that you have said proves that you are capable of any crime."

"Now you ask me to become your wife, tell me that you will do all in your power to make me happy, and offer as an alternative if I do not, that you will put my father and mother to death, and this implies that I will not gain my freedom, by my sacrifice, but still remain in your power."

"You also ask a certain ransom, what I do not know, for the guests of my parents, thus robbing them."

"You thereby show your vile nature by wishing to take their gold, and with that gold, the price of ransom, you would take me, whom you force into a marriage, into a foreign land, to support me, to force me to live upon that which they have given to free themselves of your hateful power."

"Is not this so, Senor Nunez Mora?"

"It certainly is."

"And I must consider these your terms?"

"You must, senorita," was the reply, but the man seemed nervous under the calm spirit of the young girl.

"Well, Senor Mora, you certainly are master here, that is evident; but I must have time to consider."

"I am, as you may have heard, pledged by my father to Major Rovalez."

"You know the old saying, that it is

"Well to be off with the old love,
Before you are on with the new."

"Now I cannot decide hastily, and as you have us all in your power, you can afford to be a little generous."

She spoke with an air of seeming indifference, but there was scorn in her every utterance rather than fear, and Major Rovalez said in a whisper to his fellow prisoner:

"She is a woman to idolize."

"Wonderful!" was the low-spoken response of Lieutenant Garcia.

"I do not know what terms you ask, Senorita Camblas," the mutineer said, seemingly also impressed by her manner.

"I care not to marry you, Senor Mora, that you should well understand, for your heart is as black as Satan's."

"But I care less to see my parents murdered by your merciless will, and so I do not say at once that I will not become your wife."

"I wish to consider your very flattering offer."

"I wish to talk with those who can advise me, and then you shall have your reply, and for this purpose I ask you to give me some days' time to consider."

"In a case like this you need not so much time."

"There is no particular hurry, Senor Mora, for the yacht is at sea, your monstrous conduct is not known, and no one suspects that we are in the power of such as you have proven yourself, so you could give me time to think."

"I will give you one day to decide."

"One day?"

"I will give you until sunset to-morrow night," was the stern response.

"No more?"

"Not an hour."

"And then?"

"If you decide in my favor we will sail for a port where a priest will make you my wife, and then the ransoms for the others can be arranged."

"If you decide against me, so help me High Heaven your father and mother shall be tossed into the sea."

"Now you know my terms, Senorita Camblas, and you have until sunset to-morrow to say yes or no," and the desperate villain turned upon his heel and walked forward among his men, while from the lips of the brave girl came a fervent:

"Thank God! One day's grace!"

CHAPTER XLVI.

HOPE.

THE words of Valita Camblas, that the mutineers had nothing to fear, were believed by Nunez Mora.

Unfortunately the maiden believed them herself, and she had nothing to hope.

They had not taken into consideration that the yacht was within sight and hearing of the coast when the attack was made.

So wrapped up was the treacherous leader, in his plans to seize the yacht, and yet not to kill any one of its defenders, should resistance be offered, that it had not crossed his mind that

any one on the shore would see and understand the melee on the vessel.

"Strangely enough, too, not one of the prisoners had thought of this either.

Perhaps, but for the fact that Captain Calimete, of the Spanish Guards, who was visiting at a coast plantation, and knew the yacht, nothing would have been done in the affair.

But, knowing the little vessel to be the pleasure craft of Senor Camblas, and that there certainly was trouble on board, while she had immediately after changed her course, he acted promptly, as has been seen, and with a result that sent the Sea Pearl flying in pursuit.

This being unknown to those on the vessel, there was believed to be no danger of being interfered with.

The bold front shown by Valita was simply to gain time.

She was not one to despair, and her nerve was wonderful.

With a little time, matters might change in their favor.

They might lay some plan to escape, even from that desperate crew, and already had a plot flashed through the mind of the fearless girl.

When the mutineer leader granted her time, until sunset the next day, she felt greatly relieved.

She at once took it as a matter of course that all were to be allowed to occupy their state-rooms in the cabin, as before seizure of the vessel.

But in this she was disappointed, as the planter and two officers were to remain on deck, and still be kept in irons, though they were freed of all except a chain about one foot.

Seeing that she could expect to arrange no plot, with the aid of the two officers, Valita yet did not despair, but sought the cabin and had a talk with her mother and Ysbel.

The senora seemed too crushed to have an idea, or to aid her daughter in any way, and could only moan bitterly at her lot.

The planter echoed her moans from the deck, and regretted that he had ever married.

His courage had not increased with his years, and he mentally vowed that he believed ships were fatal to him and he would never set foot upon a vessel's deck again, once he got ashore.

His experience on the burning barque, when he was engaged to the Senorita Rebello, then the attack by the Pirates of the Lagoon, and now the seizure of his yacht by the mutineers, proved that the sea was indeed a theater of ill-omen to him.

He also cursed himself for being the father of a beautiful daughter, one whom honorable men, rich men and poor ones, and also cut-throats and pirates all loved.

If he could only once more see the land and set foot upon it, he would never venture his sacred flesh and blood again upon the deep.

Major Rovalez and Lieutenant Garcia took their fate like brave men, and their sympathy was more for the brave girl who was to be the chief sufferer than for themselves, though it did worry the major as to where he was to get the large ransom which the mutineer was to demand for him, as he was by no means rich.

It was true that he had the name of being so; but it was rumor, started by himself.

He had inherited a large fortune; but his extravagant living had gone through that.

Then he lived on credit, until his creditors became clamorous, and he got transferred to Cuba, where he hoped to build up his broken fortunes.

He gambled, and often lost heavily.

He kept up his luxurious living, and resided in elegant quarters, and it was by the hardest work that he managed to keep afloat the idea that he was a rich man.

One of influence, in Cuba and in Spain, with greater influence to back him, but he was poor.

He had been but a short while in Cuba when he decided upon a plan to better his fortunes financially.

He would marry.

He cast his eyes about him, and young as she was Valita Camblas was the reigning beauty in Havana society.

Then too she was the richest heiress.

And so the honor of his attention had fallen upon Valita Camblas.

Such was Major Ramel Rovalez, and so matters stood at the opening of this story.

If Nunez Mora demanded of him, therefore, a large ransom, how was it to be paid?

This thought worried him.

While he was cogitating upon this subject, and also trying to plan more means of escape for all of them, from this frightful situation in which they found themselves, Valita was busying her bright brain with a plot to set them free.

As her mother could not help her, she turned to Ysbel Garcia and they talked together for a long time.

Then Fidela was called into the consultation, and she was asked to suggest a plan.

"Poison them."

It was a startling suggestion, and Valita said:

"You do not mean to kill them, Fidela?"

"Yes, senorita, every one of them."

"I had thought of drugging their food, or coffee, for you know father's medicine-chest is on board; but I want to get them under its influence and then bind them, but not kill them."

"I'd kill them, senorita, for the cook can put poison in what they drink."

But this Valita would not consent to, though she said:

"I will get a drug that will stupefy them, so that we can get the best of them, and it can be put in their coffee."

This was decided upon, but Nunez Mora feared just that very thing, and gave orders that not a morsel of food, prepared by the negro cook, or stewards, should his men partake of.

Thus that plot failed and Valita was almost in despair.

Slowly the night wore away, until at last the dawn came.

Not one of those in the cabin had slept during the night, and the planter and officers had also not closed their eyes.

The dawn brightened, and Valita went on deck to have a look around the horizon, with the hope that some vessel was in sight.

Then, what she beheld, brought from her lips a glad cry, and caused every eye to glance astern.

"The *goleta*! the captain-general's yacht.

"We are saved!"

So she cried in her joy, and with bitter oaths Nunez Mora bade his crew to crowd on sail, while through his shut teeth he hissed:

"Caramba! she has new sails! but it is the craft of that accursed fellow, Rebello!"

CHAPTER XLVII.

"BOARDERS AHOY!"

NUNEZ MORA was as completely taken aback by the presence of the two vessels upon his track as had those on the yacht been at his diabolical treachery.

He swore at his crew for a set of blind idiots, not to have seen the *goleta* before, when he himself had been on deck, and had not discovered the vessels.

He had not expected danger, had not dreaded pursuit, and so he had not kept a bright lookout.

The yacht had bowled merrily along during the night, having escaped the squall that had struck the Bonita and the Sea Pearl, and had held on at a steady five-knot pace under every sail.

With the increasing of the wind, toward dawn Nunez Mora shortened sail, not wishing to drive on too hard.

But, when the *goleta* was discovered hardly more than half a mile astern, he was seized with terror.

The men, as he did, knew their danger, if taken, and they sprang to work with a will.

In a short while the yacht was fairly covered with canvas, and fairly bounded along.

Mora knew that he was carrying more sail than he should, in the breeze then blowing; but he wished to place all the space possible between himself and his pursuers.

He feared the *goleta*, which he recognized, and his remark had been overheard by the keen ears of Valita, that the nearest vessel was the craft of Angelo Rebello.

"Heaven be praised! now there is hope for us," she cried.

She now recognized the *goleta's* intentions herself, after a steady look, though she saw that she had been fitted up, and had new sails also, which were larger than the others which the little vessel had had in her former race with the yacht.

The yacht of the captain-general she also recognized, but saw that she was being left astern by the other.

"The *goleta* is armed," she whispered to Major Rovalez.

"Indeed! do you see that, senorita?"

"Yes, senor."

"Then she has been quickly armed and sent in pursuit, though why I cannot understand, for who could have found out this mutiny occurred?" said the major.

No one could answer his question, but there certainly was proof that it was known that something was wrong, or else why were the governor-general's yacht and the *goleta* in pursuit?

Getting a glass, Valita turned it upon the *goleta*.

After a moment she said:

"There is no doubt now, for I recognize the Senor Rebello, and he is at the wheel himself."

"And his vessel is gaining," the major said.

"Yes, rapidly."

This now became evident, as Nunez Mora came aft, with a crew for the stern gun, and manning it, they began to fire.

The maiden and all watched the result with the deepest interest, and when the shots flew wide, their joy was revealed in their faces.

When the aim of the gunner did not improve, Nunez Mora took to sighting the gun.

It was better aimed after a shot or two, and they got the range and sent a shot through the sails now and then, while one would occasionally strike the bulwarks, or decks. Several times this occurred, and it was seen that damage was done to the crew, if not to the vessel.

But the young helmsman still held his vessel steadily on.

"Caramba! if I can only cut one of his spars down," cried the mutineer chief.

"Why does he not fire in return?" savagely said Senor Camblas, without thinking of the danger he would be in.

"He doubtless sees the ladies on deck, senor, and is too gallant a youth to risk harming them," Major Rovalez replied.

"Ah!" said the planter, and he was glad that the *goleta* did not return the fire of the mutineers.

As the firing was kept up, without checking the pursuit of the *goleta*, which continued to steadily gain, and Nunez Mora saw the joy that was upon the faces of his victims, he grew wild with passion, and ordered all of them into the cabin.

The officers and planter were released from the deck-chains, but handcuffed and sent below, and the companionway was closed.

Soon after it was opened, and the three negroes were thrown into the cabin.

Senor Nunez Mora wanted no one on deck that might be in the slightest degree a drawback to him in the fight that he was now sure must come.

He bade one of the men take his glass and count every one on board of the *goleta*.

After some trouble, the man did so, and said:

"Just twenty-seven, senor."

"And we are just thirty-one, all told, including the wounded, who must come on deck and fight."

Nearer and nearer drew the *goleta*, and faster and faster the stern gun of the yacht was fired.

Still no response came from the pursuer, though it could be seen that some of the shots were doing considerable damage.

Far astern was the Sea Pearl, but pressing on under all canvas, though at times she reeled until her lee bulwark was buried.

But Captain Toriente was determined to push on if he carried the sticks out of his vessel.

"Men, every soul of us will be hanged if we are taken."

"We slightly outnumber yonder crew, and we can beat them into the sea, seize the *goleta*, take our prisoners on board, set this craft afire and escape easily from the Government yacht!"

"Do you hear me?"

"Ay, Senor Captain!" came in stern tones from all.

"Now get your small-arms ready, load the broadside guns, and when he comes within pistol range, we will let him have it."

"Let no man throw a shot away."

"If they board, hurl them into the sea!"

His words were heard by those in the cabin, and anxiously, and with hearts beating with dire suspense, they awaited the result.

Suddenly Nunez Mora called out:

"Ho the *goleta*!"

"Ay, ay, senor," came back in the clear tones of Angelo Rebello.

"Keep off or we will sink you!"

"You are welcome to do so, senor!"

"If you attempt to board me, I will kill every prisoner I have on board," came the appalling threat.

"If you do, by the cross I vow to put you in chains, lock you in the cabin of the yacht and set her on fire," came the ringing response in answer to the savage threat of Nunez Mora.

This seemed to appall him, for he called out:

"Come on then and fight it out, and if I lose I demand mercy for myself and men."

"I make no terms!"

The two vessels were now within easy pistol range, and Nunez Mora discharged the stern gun, loaded almost to the muzzle, while his men poured in a volley of musketry.

The shots crashed into the *goleta*, but on she came, and in a moment more there was a shock, as the bows of the pursuing vessel ran alongside of the stern-quarter of the yacht!

Then came in a voice that all heard and recognized:

"Boarders ahoy! Follow me!"

A falling of feet upon the deck, pistol-shots, stern commands, steel clashing against steel, groans and cries, with a scraping of wood and loud flapping of sails as the two vessels lay together for a moment, told those shut up in the cabin that a perfect pandemonium reigned over their heads, and that the struggle for life or death had begun.

A moment more and the *goleta* swung loose; but her crew were upon the deck of the yacht, and that it was to be a fight without mercy all knew.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

THE VICTOR.

ANGELO REBELLO had certainly well planned his attack upon the yacht of the mutineers.

He had received their fire unswervingly, and

though his pretty *goleta* had not been struck in a vital spot, several of his crew had been killed and wounded.

The shot had cut through his sails, severed some of the rigging, swept through the bulwarks and along the decks; but he had held steadily upon his way, and was gaining all the time upon the chase.

When day dawned, it could be seen that he had a crew of thirty men, and they were doubtless all Cubans, from their appearance, and sailors they certainly were.

His old crew of four men, and Bono were also there, and then there were visible upon the decks two pivot-guns, one mounted forward, the other aft.

They were not of large caliber, but looked effective.

Though receiving the fire of the mutineer, he would not return it, as he knew that a shot might kill one for whom it was not intended.

So he held on his way with no response.

But the men were uneasy under the fire, and nerving themselves to strike hard when they did get the chance.

Before dawn the Valita had been sighted by those on the *goleta*, and all were happy at the thought of capturing her, for none doubted but that they could do so, and Angelo Rebello well understood his little vessel.

When at last it came to close quarters, the reader has seen that the *goleta's* crew fought like demons.

In the sea that was running, and with all sail set, Angelo Rebello feared that to lay alongside might sink one or the other of the vessels, if not both, and so he decided to just throw his boarders aboard and let the Bonita swing off.

"Bono, I wish you to take the helm and do just as I tell you," he said to the negro.

"Yes, Senor Master."

"I will lead the boarders on board the yacht, so you must run the bow of the Bonita right under the lee quarter of the chase, and we will spring on board."

"Then, when you see the last man on board, let her fall off quickly."

"Yes, Senor Master."

"I cannot leave but two men to help you, and they are both slightly wounded; but let the *goleta* follow the yacht, after we are on board, if she still holds on."

"Yes, senor."

"If we are beaten, then sail back to meet the Sea Pearl, get her crew on board, and Captain Toriente will again catch the yacht, I am sure."

"I understand, senor."

Such was Angelo Rebello's plan, and a good one it was.

He received the fire of the yacht's crew, his men crouching down in the bows, then came the shock as the vessels struck, and in a minute of time the gallant young sailor, with his men, be they pirates or honest seamen, were on the deck of the Valita.

They were bravely met by Nunez Mora and his crew, but the onslaught forced the mutineers back.

Nunez Mora saw that the young sailor had cast all upon a die, for he had cut loose from his vessel and meant to win or lose the yacht.

He knew that he had his all at stake too, and he urged his mutineer crew with voice and example.

To and fro the struggling men surged, death-blows were given and received, and the decks were red with the blood of men who fought for life and to kill.

Several times the mutineers were forced forward, and then rallying beat back the *goleta* men to the yacht's stern.

Within the cabin the faces of the prisoners told of the horror of the situation to them.

Major Rovalez was like a caged lion, that he could not aid the brave rescuers, and Lieutenant Garcia also felt his inability to do aught for their freedom.

"Oh! if we could only release you, and, with these three brave slaves, it would turn the tide of battle, for six men would be a host now," cried Valita.

But her father, the sixth, was rather more pleasantly situated where he was.

Physically and morally a coward, he had to bring all his nerve to his aid to avoid showing his great terror.

Had it come to a question of going on deck he would never have gone.

The fearful fighting above decks continued, and those below were in a horror of suspense.

How would it all end?

At last there came wild shouts.

Were they from the mutineers or the rescuers?

The question was at once answered:

"Now we have them! hurl them into the sea, men!"

The one whose voice rung out in the thrilling command was recognized by those in the cabin.

It was the voice of the young sailor, Angelo Rebello.

Then arose cries for quarter, and the same voice called out:

"Kill no man who begs for mercy!"

A chorus of cries for mercy followed this, and then the yacht was won.

But, ah! at a fearful cost, for Angelo Rebello had lost half of his men, and two-thirds of the mutineers were either dead or wounded.

CHAPTER XLIX.

AFTER THE COMBAT.

THE first duty of Angelo Rebello was to set his men to stripping the yacht of sail, for she was rolling and pitching terribly, with no one at the wheel, and the wind flapping the sails about viciously.

With lower sails only set, and a man at the tiller, the yacht glided smoothly upon her way, and ordering the dead thrown overboard, the wounded looked after by their comrades, and the decks scrubbed up, the young victor went to the cabin companionway and opened it.

He stepped within quickly, for he wished not the frightful scene on deck to meet the eyes of the ladies; but instantly came the cry from the senora:

"Let us go on deck! we will die here."

Angelo Rebello stepped back and threw open the companionway, while Valita sprang toward him and grasped his hands, at the same time saying earnestly:

"Again, senor, we owe to you life, ay, more than life."

The young sailor was flushed with the heat of battle, his handsome suit, for he was something of a dandy in his dress, was stained and torn, and his eyes flashed fire.

He looked like a young god of war and all had to admit mentally as they beheld him that he was positively grand as he stood before them.

"Senorita, the pleasure is mine in seeing you; but I hope none of your friends have been slain, or suffered injury—oh! this is bad," and he stepped quickly to the side of Major Rovalez, as he saw that he was in irons.

"Ho on deck there!"

"Ay, ay, senor."

"Search the body of that mutineer leader and get the keys for these irons."

The men obeyed promptly, while Major Rovalez said:

"We owe much to you, senor, more than you believe."

"But is the ringleader dead?"

"Yes, senor, he fell in the action," was the modest reply.

"The Senor Rebello killed him, senor, ran him through in a sword fight between them," said the sailor, who was unlocking the irons from the major's wrists.

"You are as modest, Senor Rebello, as you are brave."

"But let us go on deck, for I feel as though I could not breathe here," Valita remarked.

"Go, senorita, and we will join you there," the major said.

Then, as his hands were released he again thanked the young sailor, while Lieutenant Garcia and Senor Camblas did the same, the latter with considerable gush of manner.

The party then went on deck, and the scene presented showed how fearful had been the combat.

The Senora Camblas was seated in an easy-chair, which Valita had ordered one of the negroes to bring from the cabin for her, and Fidela, between laughing and crying, was trying to keep her from seeing the scene of horror forward by interposing herself between her and the rest of the vessel.

The crew of the *goleta* had already put the mutineers in irons, and the dead were massed in the fore-castle, ready to be thrown into the sea, while the wounded lay amidships, attended as well as possible by their companions.

The *goleta* was not far distant, her sails fluttering loose to keep her in the wake of the yacht, and with Bono and the two wounded men in charge.

Far astern, nearly a league distant the yacht of the captain-general was coming on with a will, though her speed, good as it was, had not been sufficient to keep her near the other two vessels.

Under the orders of Valita, who thoroughly kept her presence of mind, the three negro men were making the after-part of the yacht presentable as fast as possible; but coming on deck with the two officers and Senor Camblas, Rebello said:

"My little vessel is at your service, senor, if you prefer to go on board of her and escape this sight, though there are dead and wounded men there also, and perhaps you would prefer the Sea Pearl, which will soon be here."

"We will await the coming of the captain-general's yacht, senor, for I wish to be near no dead or dying men," Senora Camblas said, with her usual selfishness.

"But how is it, Senor Rebello, that you are here, and none of the Spanish sailors seem to be with you?" Major Rovalez asked.

"I have only my own crew, senor, and, when I was informed by Captain Concha last night that some harm had befallen this vessel, I came in chase."

"It is well you did, senor, for the Sea Pearl would never have overtaken us," Valita said.

"My little vessel is very fleet, senorita, as I knew, and I felt that I could catch the yacht."

"But how did you learn of the mutiny?" urged

Major Rovalez, who seemed to regret, and showed it, that the Sea Pearl had not been the rescuer.

"The struggle on board was seen from the shore, by an officer, who at once sent word to Havana, and Captain Concha boarded the Sea Pearl and came in chase, as I understand it."

"They sighted the *goleta* lying off shore, and I gladly came also in pursuit."

"And right well you did your work, Senor Rebello; but how is it you had so large a crew on board, and guns also, I see?"

"I had them, Senor Rovalez, for a service which I prefer to keep to myself," was the reply of Rebello, who saw just what the major was after, trying to find more cause for complaint against his rescuer.

"I hardly think, Major Rovalez, that you need to try and investigate who and what your rescuers are yet awhile."

"There will be ample time, if you will only have patience," Valita said, for she too saw that the officer was really angry at having to admit a service to Angelo Rebello.

"My child, Major Rovalez is an officer of Spain, and his duties are to clear up what looks to him suspicious," tartly said Senor Camblas.

"My dear father, I am sure that we do not owe our rescue to either yourself or Major Rovalez, though I will say that the major fought like a lion to save us from the attack of the mutineers."

"Having escaped all that we have through the great courage of this gentleman, pray let us not inquire into the means he has used to rescue us."

"Yes, Camblas, you kept very quiet when there was fighting to be done, so pray do so now," said the Senora Camblas, and the husband subsided under the two rebukes received from wife and daughter.

As though to avoid further discussion, Angelo Rebello walked forward, and a few moments after the Sea Pearl ran up near, lay to, and sent a boat aboard the yacht.

In the boat came Captain Toriente and Cristobal Concha, and they warmly congratulated the party upon their escape, and praised Rebello for his gallant rescue.

But Major Rovalez said, with a sneer:

"As before, he has saved us with a pirate crew, I guess, which he has picked up from a wreck!"

"For shame, Major Rovalez," cried Valita, while, turning upon him, Angelo Rebello said, in his quiet way:

"Major Rovalez, be the crew what they may, half of them lost their lives to save one whom the saving of was not worth the sacrifice of a gallant life."

"Ha! this you dare say to me?" cried the major, furious at the words.

"Senor Rovalez, I do not fear you, powerful as you are—I despise you!" was the stinging retort of Angelo Rebello.

But what the major intended to do was prevented by Captain Concha's stern command:

"This must cease right here, for it is unworthy of you, Rovalez."

"You side with that boy, Concha?" fiercely said Major Rovalez.

"I side with justice, Major Rovalez, and you will find the captain-general also of my opinion," was the significant response of the young aide.

Ramel Rovalez had too much at stake to risk a quarrel with Captain Concha, and he simply turned on his heel and walked away, for harassed with debts, if ordered back to Spain, his downfall would come quickly, and the influence of Cristobal Concha with Don Quixote was well known.

No, he could afford to wait, for by waiting he would yet be captain-general and also win the fair Valita, and power and money would make him supreme in Cuba, he thought.

CHAPTER L.

SUSPICION.

IN a few words Captain Concha told the party of the letter sent by Captain Calimete, of the guards, and how he had been ordered to come in pursuit of the yacht by the captain-general.

The meeting with the Bonita was also made known, and the coming of that vessel also in chase, and great praise was bestowed upon Angelo Rebello for the very plucky pursuit and daring capture of the yacht, for those upon the Sea Pearl had seen all with unbiased eyes.

Lieutenant Garcia, as Major Rovalez and Senor Camblas stood aloof in conversation, made known then the full history of the mutiny under Nunez Mora, and all that he had threatened, and Captain Toriente and Cristobal Concha congratulated over again upon their rescue, while the commander of the Sea Pearl placed his yacht at their service.

"As we have all our traps on board, mother, suppose we remain on our yacht, and ask Captain Toriente to take the dead and wounded to his vessel?" suggested Valita.

This was decided upon, after consultation with Senor Camblas and Major Rovalez, and the removal of the dead and wounded was begun, while Angelo Rebello got his crew together, and called to one of the men on the Bonita to bring a boat aboard for them, if they could manage to lower it.

"No, Senor Rebello, my boats will be at your service, for you have too much sail up, and are too light-handed to let your crew do so, as I see but two men on board besides the helmsman," said Captain Toriente.

"I thank you, senor, and accept your kind offer, for it is a big risk."

And Rebello hailed the Bonita, countermanding the order, which was well, as the two wounded men could hardly have carried it out.

But Angelo Rebello was anxious to ask no favors.

He saw that he was looked upon with suspicion, and he wished to get on board the Bonita and set sail as soon as possible.

That the Senora Valita, Ysabel Garcia and her brother, appreciated what he had done, he saw; but Major Rovalez and Senor Camblas showed plainly that they were angry at owing their rescue to him.

"Could you not have driven your vessel a little harder, Toriente?" asked Senor Camblas.

"No, senor, for I was pushing her all I dared."

"But the *goleta* got here ahead of you?"

"She outsailed me, as she did your yacht, too, Senor Camblas."

"My yacht was not doing her best."

"It is strange that she was not, with that mutinous crew, who knew their lives were the forfeit of their capture, and with a sailing-master who has commanded her from the day she was launched."

"No, senor, the *goleta* is the fastest craft I ever met, and she was handled magnificently, while a more daring rescue I never saw than Rebello made."

"But who is he, Toriente?"

"I know nothing about him more than Captain Concha says of him."

"And what is that?"

"That he is an honest young sailor, who was born a gentleman but is poor."

"I believe him to be recently a pirate."

"Then all you have to do, senor, is to prove it; but his actions, in twice saving you and your yacht, seem to be a great deal in his favor."

"But how about his vessel being armed, and his having such a large crew?"

"I do not know, senor."

"Is it not suspicious?"

"It is."

"Well, are you going to allow him to depart?"

"Senor, I hardly know."

"I should advise not."

"I will talk with Major Rovalez, Captain Concha and Lieutenant Garcia. What they decide, I will do."

"I will call them into the cabin," and Senor Camblas bustled about with wonderful alacrity, to get the officers together for a council of war upon the suspicious circumstance of the Bonita being armed and having so large a crew.

The four officers were soon assembled in the cabin, and the matter was discussed with the pros and cons of the case.

Captain Concha and Lieutenant Garcia felt that the young sailor should be trusted, after all that he had done, and be allowed to go free, while a watch could be put upon him, to see if he was really guilty of piracy or not.

Major Rovalez on the other hand, and Captain Toriente, who wished to be in the right, and on the safe side, though he admitted it was hard treatment of the young sailor after his gallantry, thought it best to carry the Bonita back to port, and then have her master prove his innocence of wrong-doing.

"Let us have him come here; place the situation before him, and see what he has to say for himself," suggested Lieutenant Garcia.

This was agreed to, and the lieutenant went on deck and called to Angelo Rebello to come into the cabin.

He did so promptly, while Valita, feeling that there was some plot working against the youth, stood with white, stern face looking into the sea.

"They may plot, but I will act," she muttered, and her father, coming up to speak to her, caught her flashing eyes and felt that it would be safer to let her alone just then.

So he went over to his wife and said:

"Valita is in a fury, wife."

"She has a right to be," was the snappish reply of his spouse.

"And what about?"

"Twice that young sailor has saved your vessel and our lives, and instead of fighting for him, be he pirate or priest, you are hounding Major Rovalez on to crush him."

"It is shameful in you, Marez Camblas, and unworthy the name of man."

"You think, because Valita defends him, she may love him, and thus disappoint you in your plot to marry her to Rovalez, a captain-general in embryo, but if you go too far you will find that Valita is as unlike you as I am, and she will not be made a tool of."

"Now mark my words."

"But if he is a pirate, should he not be punished?"

"No, he should be pardoned for what he has

this day done, and if he be a pirate, I shall ask the captain-general myself to pardon him."

Senor Camblas winced and walked away; but just then he was called into the cabin by Major Rovalez.

CHAPTER LI. IN IRONS.

WHEN Angelo Rebello entered the cabin of the yacht, Major Rovalez, who, from his rank, was the leader in the council, did not ask him to be seated, seeing which Captain Concha said:

"Sit down, Senor Rebello, for we wish to have a talk with you."

The major scowled, while Rebello said quickly: "Thank you, Captain Concha, but I will stand, for I cannot delay long."

"I wish to ask you, senor, a few direct questions," Major Rovalez remarked, sternly:

"Kindly be brief in them, Major Rovalez, for I have much to do."

Captain Concha and Lieutenant Garcia smiled, but the major was getting very angry.

"I shall take my own time, senor, and I advise you to be respectful in your replies."

"Respect begets respect, Senor Rovalez, and if you do not treat me as one gentleman should another, albeit that I am poor and command a coaster craft, I will not choose my words in addressing you."

"Do you hear this insolence?" cried Rovalez, almost beside himself with rage.

"Permit me to question Senor Rebello, Major Rovalez, as you seem to desire to offend him, rather than to get at what we wish to know?"

Had the speaker been other than Cristobal Concha, he would have had an insult thrown in his face by the angry officer he addressed; but instead he answered, with an effort at coolness:

"As you represent the captain-general, as his aide, Concha, perhaps it would be as well for you to question him."

"Thank you," said Captain Concha.

"And I thank you, Major Rovalez," added Rebello, and all but the major smiled.

"Senor Rebello, I am sorry that the question should come up here, in the face of your most conspicuous bravery, but Major Rovalez, Captain Toriente and Lieutenant Garcia, with myself, as Spanish officers, wish you to explain that which we look upon as of a most suspicious nature," and Concha spoke with extreme courtesy.

"What is that you would wish to know, Captain Concha?" asked Rebello quietly.

"Pardon me, Senor Rebello, if I speak plainly, but it is best to get at the facts."

"Certainly, senor, if you can."

And the *if* you can was spoken in a most significant tone.

"You remember that upon a former occasion, when you saved the yacht of Senor Camblas from capture by the pirates, it was deemed that the crew you had were outlaws and you their chief?"

"I remember, senor."

"There are several small piratical vessels in West Indian waters, that cannot be captured, and whose movements are mysterious, and thus suspicion fell upon you."

"Your crew, you said, had been taken from a wreck, and your log showed it, and, from being sentenced to death, you were pardoned by the captain-general, who sent me to Cardenas to investigate your record."

"To me it was satisfactory, and the captain-general so regarded it; but others still had their suspicions, it seemed, that you were a pirate."

"You sailed for home, and now, a short while after, we find your vessel wholly refitted, her spars enlarged, her sails new, and the sails are greatly increased, and you are discovered lying under bare poles several leagues off the Cuban coast, and in hiding, by your own words."

"The yacht under the mutineers had passed you, without discovering you, and we might have done so too, but for the close watch kept."

"You said, upon boarding us, that you were hiding, but gave no reason therefore."

"You gladly consented to pursue this vessel, and most nobly did you do the work you intended."

"But we find that your crew, from four men and a negro, have had added thirty more seamen to it."

"We find that you have mounted two pivot guns upon your vessel, and this is what gives it a suspicious look against you."

"We now ask you for an explanation?"

All had listened to the words of Captain Concha with deepest interest.

His manner was most kind, and he seemed anxious to show to Angelo Rebello the greatest courtesy.

The face of the young sailor no one could read.

It was perfectly calm, and yet not a feature betrayed what was passing in his mind.

"Captain Concha, you have been kind in your treatment of me, and I wish you to consider it no disrespect on my part; but I say, senor, that I have no explanation to make!"

To argue the case with him, Captain Concha saw was useless, so he said:

"You know best, Senor Rebello."

"Then I am at liberty to go, senor?"

"To the deck, yes; but do not leave the yacht yet."

"I will not, senor," and Rebello turned and left the cabin, while Major Rovalez said:

"I'll see that he does not, by placing a guard from the Sea Pearl over him."

"Hold, Major Rovalez!"

"I will answer for him, senor, and until we decide here what is to be done, he shall not be put under guard."

Major Rovalez yielded with a bow, and Captain Concha continued:

"Now, senors, what say you?"

"What say you, Captain Concha?" asked Toriente.

"I do not like his refusing an explanation, and I would say that he be ordered to come on with us to port."

"And I say he shall go in irons," Major Rovalez sternly said.

"I think it well for him to go to port with us," Lieutenant Garcia remarked.

"Yes, and I think he should be put in irons," added Captain Toriente.

"Senors, we are divided equally, as to putting him in irons," Captain Concha said.

"Let us call Senor Camblas, for it is his vessel, and he will decide," Major Rovalez said, and quickly stepping to the companionway he called to the planter to come to the cabin.

Senor Camblas was glad to get away from his wife's tongue-lashing, and obeyed with promptness.

"I know how it will go now, Garcia," said Captain Concha.

He was right, for Senor Camblas suggested that as the *goleta* outsailed the two yachts, Angelo Rebello had it in his power to escape, if he wished to do so, and that he and his men should be put in irons, a crew from the Sea Pearl sent on board the Bonita, and the three vessels headed at once for Havana.

This carried it against the young sailor, and Angelo Rebello found himself again in irons, for he made no effort at resistance, simply saying to his men:

"Offer no resistance, lads!"

CHAPTER LII. CONFLICTING STORIES.

UNDER shortened sail the three pretty vessels headed back to Havana, the *goleta* leading in spite of her canvas being reduced to keep her even with the others.

Valita had seen with a sinking heart the act of ingratitude that placed the young sailor in irons, along with his crew, and she and Ysabel Garcia, as also the Senora Camblas, had spoken in very indignant tones against it.

Captain Concha and Lieutenant Garcia told them that they hoped all would come well; but it seemed a very hard thing to the three ladies that Rebello should be put in irons, after all that he had done.

So back to Havana the yachts sailed, and they dropped anchor, with the Bonita in between the other two.

The Senor Camblas remained on his yacht while his family drove at once to their home, and Captain Concha, accompanied by Major Rovalez and Toriente, went up to the Palacio to report to the captain-general.

The wounded were sent on shore, and the dead had been buried on the way to port, so that the three vessels were left to their crews alone, a prize-crew being on the *goleta*, and an officer and seamen having been loaned to Senor Camblas by Captain Toriente until the planter secured a master and men to put on his yacht.

The captain-general had been most anxious about the yacht's safety, with those on board, since receiving the letter from Captain Calimete, and he was very glad when it was reported that the Sea Pearl was returning along with the Valita and another craft.

What this other craft was he did not know until the arrival of the three officers at the Palacio, and he received them immediately.

"Welcome back, senors, and, Concha, let me at once hear your report, for it strikes me, from what has been told me, you have had an interesting time to say the least."

"Major Rovalez, I am glad to see you."

"Toriente, I trust you enjoyed your leave?" and in his courtly way the governor received the three visitors.

When they were seated and refreshments ordered, of wine and sweet cakes, Captain Concha told his story from beginning to end, just as it had occurred.

Several times Major Rovalez would have interrupted, but the governor checked him politely, and listened with the deepest attention.

When Captain Concha had ended his recital, which had been an unvarnished, straightforward statement of the facts coming under his observation, Don Quixote made no comment, but said:

"Major Rovalez, will you kindly give me your report, as seen on the yacht Valita?"

The major did so, telling of the mutiny, and how it was discovered through Fidela, the quad-room maid of the Senorita Valita.

Then he spoke of the day's grace given to Senorita Camblas, and how, when the morning

dawned, the *goleta* and the Sea Pearl were seen to be in chase.

The crowding on of all sail, by the mutineers, he spoke of, dilating upon trivial incidents, and skimming over the grand rescue made by Angelo Rebello and his men.

He however spoke very sternly of the impudence of the young sailor in addressing him, and commented largely upon the fact that the *goleta* was armed and had a large crew, concluding with the words:

"Now, Eccellenza, your clemency toward that young pirate before, has given him freedom to continue his lawless acts, and, although I would beg mercy for him of you, still I think imprisonment at least, for a few years, should be his just punishment."

The governor bowed at this, made no comment, and turned to Captain Toriente with the remark:

"Now, senior, I will hear your story; but as Senor Camblas and Lieutenant Garcia were also on board the yacht, I will trouble you, Senor Concha, to send at once for them."

The captain arose and obeyed, while Captain Toriente told his story from his point of observation.

Still the governor made no comment, and led the conversation to other topics until the arrival of Senor Camblas and the lieutenant, both of whom had been readily found.

"My dear Senor Camblas, I am sorry to trouble you, but this affair in which this alleged young pirate has taken so conspicuous a part, causes me to desire to hear the story of the chase and capture from every standpoint, and so I ask to learn what you have to say?" said Don Quixote, after his congratulating Senor Camblas upon his escape from death.

Senor Camblas told his version, and there was a striking similarity in all he said to what had been the version of Major Rovalez.

Still the governor made no utterance, for or against, and at last turned to Lieutenant Garcia.

Having heard the latter's views, the governor said in his suave way:

"I thank you, seniors, and now I can arrive at a conclusion so as to take action in the matter."

"I would like to offer a request for mercy, Eccellenza, for the young pirate, with a request that his life be spared, but imprisonment for a time be his punishment," said Senor Camblas.

Don Quixote bowed, and remarked:

"Your suggestion is worthy of consideration, Senor Camblas, in that Major Rovalez has just made the same request."

"There is in fact, a remarkable unanimity of feeling between the gallant major and yourself in this affair."

Captain Concha thought he detected sarcasm in the governor's words; but Senor Camblas did not appear to notice it, when the face of the major flushed slightly.

Soon after all took their leave and the governor was left alone.

But only for a short while, as a servant appeared with a request for an audience from two ladies.

"Who are they?"

"I know not, Eccellenza, for they gave no names and are closely veiled beyond recognition," answered the servant.

"Admit them," was the reply, and then entered two ladies, who were certainly, as the servant had said, veiled beyond recognition.

CHAPTER LIII.

A WOMAN'S PLEADING.

"SENIORITA CAMBLAS, how can I serve you?"

Such was the salutation of Don Quixote, as he advanced toward the two veiled visitors to the Palacio.

"You recognize me then?" and Valita threw back her veil.

"Nothing could disguise the fair form of Senorita Camblas, and if I mistake not the Senorita Garcia is your companion?" was the gallant reply.

"Yes Eccellenza, we are both discovered," was Ysbel Garcia's reply, as she too threw back her veil.

"Perhaps I can also tell the secret of your visit to me?" said Don Quixote with a smile.

"It is upon an errand that I once called before, to see you upon, Eccellenza remarked Valita.

"The release of Senor Rebello?"

"Yes, senior, and we came because we feel that injustice will be done him if you heed not what is said to you by, I regret to say, my father and Major Rovalez, who certainly mean him harm," said Valita.

"I have heard their stories, senorita, of the affair."

"So soon?"

"Yes, and also what Captains Concha and Toriente, and Lieutenant Garcia have had to say."

"The three last are unbiased in their opinions, Eccellenza."

"And I would be glad to hear your account, senoritas."

"We will gladly tell you all we know, though

there are some things which we cannot understand, and hence cannot explain."

"Well, Senorita Camblas, let me know what occurred as you saw it."

"From the meeting?"

"Yes."

Valita Camblas at once began her story.

Not a thing that had occurred escaped her, not a word was left unsaid that could aid Angelo Rebello's cause, not a word too much did she utter.

The governor did not interrupt her.

He simply listened with the deepest attention.

"And now, Senorita Garcia?"

In her low-voiced, innocent way Ysbel Garcia told her story to the end; but what impression either of them made upon the governor, neither could tell from his face.

"It is well, senoritas, to hear both sides of a story; in fact, sometimes there are more than two sides, as in this case, for I have heard the report of my officers, your father, Senorita Camblas, and the major and lieutenant, who were upon the yacht."

"I have also had the pleasure of listening to the occurrences from a feminine standpoint."

"Now there is one other to hear."

"And that other, Eccellenza?"

"The story of Senor Rebello."

"He would offer no explanation when questioned, Captain Concha said."

"So I learned."

"And I fear he will offer none to you, Eccellenza."

"Doubtless, if he has so made up his mind."

"I fear he has."

"Then how do you account, Senorita Camblas, for his having an armed craft, a crew of thirty men, and lying under bare poles at night off the coast, when he commands, as is said, a trading craft, and had a good breeze to be going upon his way, while there is not a bit of cargo in the hold of his vessel?"

"Ah, Eccellenza, I do not know how to account for it," said Valita.

"Nor you, Senorita Garcia?"

"No, Eccellenza."

"You must admit that it seems mysterious?"

"It does."

"He had, but a short while before been released by me, and is found under circumstances that shake even your faith in him, Senorita Camblas."

"I admit it, senior, and yet I would beg of you mercy for him."

"If he be, as my father and Major Rovalez vow that he is, and others fear, a pirate, he certainly risked his life to save us from the Lagoon Pirates."

"And again he not only risked his life, but suffered a loss of half his crew to rescue us from that fiend in human form, Nunez Mora, and his mutineers."

"Had his vessel not had that crew on board, be they pirates or honest seamen, he could not have saved us."

"Had they not been armed it would be madness for him to attack the mutineers."

"But, Eccellenza, having done so, I beg of you pardon for him."

"And what of the mutineers, senorita?"

"Their chief confessed them as pirates, and they proved what they were in aiding to seize the yacht; but they are in your hands, Eccellenza."

"For punishment?"

"Or pardon, as you deem best, Eccellenza."

"Their chief was slain by the young sailor, Rebello?"

"Yes, senior, so a seaman said, though Senor Rebello had modestly told us that he fell in action."

"He avenged then the insult of this man upon you?"

"Yes, Eccellenza."

"And you ask pardon for this alleged pirate, Senorita Camblas?"

"I plead for it with all my heart, Senor Eccellenza?"

"And you, Senorita Garcia?"

"I urge my prayers with Valita, Eccellenza."

"And your mother, Senorita Camblas?"

"Would urge pardon also of Senor Rebello, Eccellenza."

The governor was silent a moment.

Then he arose and paced the room, his hands behind his back.

With anxious hearts the two maidens watched him, and at last he turned and said:

"Suppose I pardon this man, Senorita Camblas, will you guarantee his honesty in the future?"

"I will do so, Senor Eccellenza, to save him," was the frank response.

"You believe that he will be an honorable man then?"

"Eccellenza, I do not believe him to be what he is charged with being."

"A pirate?"

"Yes, senior."

"Senorita Camblas, I will give you a release for this young man and his vessel."

"Take it to him yourself, though of course you will have to first see Captain Toriente on board my vessel."

"Give the release to Senor Rebello, and tell him that you asked it for him."

"Tell him to put to sea with his crew, and that the governor, as you do, expects him to persevere in the honorable career he has entered upon."

"Ah, Eccellenza! you believe him honorable then?"

"It certainly is an honorable career to rescue you as he did," was the somewhat evasive reply.

"Senor Eccellenza, I thank you, and may Heaven bless you," and Valita grasped the governor's hand, while tears filled her beautiful eyes.

"Do you fear to go with this release to Rebello?"

"Indeed no, senior, for he risked life to save us. Why should we care what would be said, if we carry to him his release from irons and imprisonment?" was the spirited reply.

Don Quixote smiled and said:

"You are a remarkable woman, Senorita Camblas."

Then he seated himself at his table and wrote out the release for Angelo Rebello, his vessel and crew.

Touching a bell a servant appeared.

"Is Lieutenant Garcia on duty?"

"Captain Concha is, Eccellenza."

"Ask him to come here."

In obedience, Captain Concha entered the room, and he seemed surprised to see Valita and Ysbel there.

But the governor said:

"Captain Concha, I have given to Senorita Camblas a release here for Senor Rebello, his vessel and crew."

"Thank you, Eccellenza, thank you, earnestly said the young officer, while Don Quixote continued:

"The senorita will carry this release herself, so kindly escort her and Senorita Garcia on board the *goleta* and send for Toriente to come there."

"Yes, Eccellenza," and with smiling faces the three left the presence of the captain-general, for Cristobel Concha had in mind the sorrow it would give the beautiful sister and lovely mother of Angelo Rebello, did harm come to him, and his name be branded with infamy as a pirate.

CHAPTER LIV.

FREE.

ON board of the *goleta* the young captain and his two fair companions went in a government barge, while word was sent to the Sea Pearl for Captain Toriente to join them there.

Captain Toriente had not done, as Major Rovalez asked, put Angelo Rebello in the hold of his vessel, but instead had him confined in the cabin, though he was chained to a ringbolt in the floor.

There the three visitors were ushered, by the officer in charge of the *goleta*, who knew that the word of Captain Concha, as the governor's aide, was law.

Angelo Rebello arose at their entrance.

He seemed almost indifferent to his position, but bent low before the young ladies and saluted Captain Concha.

Valita stepped forward and held out her hand, while she said:

"We have come to see you, Senor Rebello, to bring you good news, for we but now left the Palacio and I have the order for your release."

"You are most kind, Senorita Camblas, and I thank you, as I also do the governor."

"But the release does not include me alone?"

"No, your vessel and crew as well."

"I am glad of that."

"We asked for a pardon for you, Senor Rebello, but the governor gave the release instead," said Ysbel Garcia.

"A pardon, senorita, would imply that I had committed some known crime, whereas I believe only circumstantial evidence condemns me as a pirate," said Rebello, and Captain Concha remarked earnestly:

"A point well taken, Senor Rebello; but here comes Captain Toriente, and you will at once be released."

Captain Toriente was surprised, his face showed it, at seeing who it was in the cabin of the *goleta*, but he was also pleased when he heard the reason for their coming, and hastily ordered the prisoners all freed from their irons, while he said:

"Senor Rebello, I congratulate you, for be you even as suspicion points you out to be, I would urge your freedom surely on account of your magnificent courage."

"I thank you, Captain Toriente," was the only reply.

Valita felt disappointed, for she had hoped that Angelo Rebello would make some explanation to clear up the mystery of his conduct, would account in some way for the arms and men on his vessel, and her position as found by the Sea Pearl.

But he remained silent, and she said:

"Senor Rebello, the governor-general bids me say to you that he hopes you will prosper in the honorable course you have chosen."

"I am glad, Senorita Camblas, that the gov-

ernor is pleased with what I have done, and will you, Captain Concha, present to him my appreciation of his kindness?"

"I will certainly do so, Senor Rebello."

"Now, Captain Toriente, am I at liberty?"

"Yes, senor."

"And my vessel and crew?"

"Are under your orders, Senor Rebello."

"Again I thank you, Senorita Camblas, and all of you."

It seemed that he was anxious to be off, and the visitors bade him farewell and left the *goleta*.

As they reached the shore they saw the swift vessel sailing swiftly out of the harbor, the Castle El Moro having been signaled from the Sea Pearl to let her pass, and Valita said, in an almost dejected tone:

"Not a word of explanation did he offer."

"I had hoped that he could clear himself of the charge upon him."

Then she entered her *volante* and drove out to the Villa Eden Plantation, Ysbel Garcia accompanying her as her guest.

And on her way sped the *goleta*, shaping her course toward Cardenas.

Upon her arrival at home, Valita made known to her mother just what she and Ysbel had done, but not a word was said to Senor Camblas upon the subject.

The Senora Camblas was as delighted as she ever allowed herself to be upon any matter outside of her personal enjoyments, and so expressed herself, while she added:

"I hope, after this second lesson he has received, the handsome young pirate will try and lead an honest life."

It was two days before Senor Camblas heard the news, and then he got it from Major Rovalez, who sent a special courier out with a note which told him:

"That young pirate has been pardoned, and went to sea two days ago."

"Come in at once to see me."

Senor Camblas ordered his carriage and drove with all haste to the city, gritting his teeth with rage that the son of the man who had been his rival in the long ago, and whom he had been terribly revenged upon, should escape after all, through the mercy of the governor-general, and with no punishment whatever visited upon him for his piracies upon the high seas.

CHAPTER LV.

A PAIR OF PLOTTERS.

SEÑOR CAMBLAS found Major Ramel Rovalez pacing his room like a caged tiger.

"Did you get my letter?" he eagerly asked.

"It is why I came."

"Then you know that the governor has set that accursed pirate free?"

"Yes, but when?"

"Two days ago; but I have not felt well, and keeping to my rooms only heard it this morning."

"But why did he set him free?"

"Because your lovely daughter asked it."

"*Caramba!*"

"It is true."

"She said nothing to me about it."

"That may be; but she went, with Senorita Garcia, to call at the Palacio the very afternoon of our arrival."

"The governor heard her story, and set him free."

"I certainly hoped that he would imprison him as we wished."

"So did I, but a pretty face won him over."

"And upon what grounds did he let him go?"

"I do not know, other than that he captured the yacht from the mutineers."

"And his crew?"

"He also released."

"And his vessel?"

"He sailed in it the very day of our arrival."

"Then I cannot buy it?"

"It seems not."

"Did he carry his guns?"

"Yes, went out, just as he came in."

"And is at his old piratical work again ere this?"

"Doubtless."

"Can we do nothing?"

"In what respect?"

"*Caramba!* to hang him?"

"I only wish that we could."

"We might try again, for if you do not, he will run off with your daughter as surely as he is a pirate."

Senor Camblas fairly howled.

"It would not sound very well to have it said that the fair Senorita Camblas ran off with a pirate."

"*Maldito!* no!"

"It will surely be."

"What can be done?"

"You hinted to me once that you had another trap to spring upon him, once he was in prison."

"Ha! I have; but he is not in prison."

"Can we not get him there again?"

"How?"

"What is your trap?"

"I will tell you, and I believe it will frighten the governor into hanging him."

"Let me know it."

"You have heard of an American naval officer, who, many years ago, was executed as a conspirator?"

"Ah, yes! his name was Kirkwood, I believe."

"Yes."

"And he was called the Sea Insurgent?"

"That is the man."

"Well?"

"*This Rebello is his son!*"

The major sprung to his feet.

"Do you mean it?"

"I do."

"Prove this, and I will be governor-general before six months, and the Senorita Camblas will be my wife in half that time."

"He is the son of Kirkwood, the Sea Insurgent, and his mother took her own name after the execution of her husband."

"His name was Angelo Kirkwood, and the boy's name is Angelo Rebello, the latter being his mother's name."

"Do you know this?"

"I do."

"Did you ever see this Sea Insurgent?"

"I fought a *duello* with him."

"*Maldito!* you should know him then."

"Very well, for he married the woman to whom I was engaged."

"You have cause to hate him then?"

"Ah, yes, for he saved my life and hers from a burning vessel."

"She fell in love with him, set me adrift, and became his wife."

"But I got my revenge."

"I am glad of that!"

"Yet I am still revengeful."

"I don't wonder, senor!"

"It was said that he was a conspirator; but the arms and munitions of war found in his vessel, for he was master of a trader, I had put there, as I did papers also, to condemn him."

"Then he was innocent?"

"Yes, so we understand each other, and I do not mind telling you, as I know your plot to take the life of the governor-general and thus hasten your appointment in his place."

The major winced, but said:

"Go on, senor, with the story of the Sea Insurgent."

"I set myself to be avenged, and so ruined old Rebello financially, got a mortgage upon his estates, and he blew his brains out."

"His daughter and son-in-law, the Sea Insurgent, went to live on the coast, and Kirkwood became, as I told you, master of a coast trader."

"Then I saw my chance to destroy him, and I did."

"I sought his widow, where she went to live, in New Orleans, and asked her to become my wife."

"She scorned me, yes, and would have shot me, had I not retreated, and threatened her with death if I ever crossed her path again."

"I came back to Cuba and married the Senorita Camblas; but I am still revengeful, and the old game can be played again."

"I believe if the governor knew that the young pirate was the son of the Sea Insurgent, and it was hinted that he was landing arms and men upon the Cuban coast, to wrest the island from Spain, this would account for the guns he had on board, and large force, and so alarm Don Quixote that he would at once send a vessel-of-war after him."

"Let us try it then."

"I am willing."

"Suppose you pretend to get information that a vessel, answering the description of the *goleta*, was seen off the coast, say to-night, and landing men?"

"The very thing."

"And I will bribe my overseer on my coast plantation to come to me with a report that the *goleta* ran in there and landed some men by night."

"All right, you go to the governor at this hour ten days hence, and make your report, while I will make it convenient to get there at the same time and make mine."

"I will not fail."

"Nor I."

And the two plotters parted, to carry out their plan to ruin Angelo Rebello, the Sea Insurgent's son, whom Senor Camblas was dogging with revengeful steps as he had his father before him.

CHAPTER LVI.

CONCLUSION.

SEATED in his luxurious quarters, the governor-general was reading a letter which a servant had brought in, to be given alone into his hands.

The letter read:

"I have information from a reliable spy, whom I have on watch, that two persons will manage to reach your Eccellenza's presence about the same time this afternoon, between the hours of five and six."

"It will appear like an accident, they coming there, but it is arranged between them to do so."

"Their reports will be about the same, only pretending to emanate from different sources."

"Their motive is to destroy Senor Angelo Rebello, one fearing him as a rival for my hand, the other to visit a revenge upon him for a hatred felt for his father."

"I am at the command of your Eccellenza, should you desire more information and proof of what I now write you."

"With esteem,

"Your Eccellenza's

"Obedient servant,

"VALITA CAMBLAS."

"Don Quixote read this letter over several times, and then muttered:

"The plot thickens, and more deeply interests me."

Just then a servant entered to announce a visitor, who was admitted and greeted most cordially by the governor.

For some time the two chatted pleasantly together, and a second visitor was announced.

"Senor, just step into this room and await my leisure," said the governor.

And he led his visitor into an adjoining room, and then his other caller was admitted.

"Major Rovalez, you are welcome."

"You have been much of a stranger of late."

"Yes, Eccellenza, I have been on a task that I wished to make sure of the truth of before coming to you with a report."

"And your coming proves that you have gotten at the truth of the matter, whatever it is?"

"Yes, senor."

"And what is it, Major Rovalez?"

"Senor, there is a secret insurrection on foot."

The governor started, and asked sternly:

"How know you this?"

"Word was brought me from the coast, senor, that caused me to at once investigate if it was true or false."

"The story went that a small vessel, spreading a vast amount of canvas, had been seen hovering off the coast near Matanzas, at night, and furthermore, after midnight, had run in and made a landing."

"This looks suspicious, Major Rovalez."

"So I thought, senor, and I set a man to watch, and his report was that a vessel answering the description did come in seven nights ago and make such a landing."

"Did he say what was landed?"

"Arms, he supposed, which were placed on pack-horses and sent off, while as many as thirty men landed with them."

"This is startling tidings you bring, Major Rovalez."

"I went to the scene myself, senor, and saw indications of a landing there, and, as the vessel was reported off the coast again, I decided to at once come to you."

"You should have done so sooner, Major Rovalez."

"But describe the vessel fully."

"A *goleta*, carrying very large canvas, that was new, and lying low in the water, while it was thought that she carried two pivot guns."

"Why this answers the description of the craft of that young pirate, Rebello, as you thought him."

"It does indeed, Eccellenza, now I think of it."

"Do you think that he can be up to some conspiracy?"

"It may be, Eccellenza, instead of being a pirate, as was supposed."

Just then a servant announced:

"Senor Camblas."

"Admit him."

"I will retire, Eccellenza."

"No, it can be nothing private, so keep your seat."

Senor Camblas came in, looking a trifle pale and nervous.

He greeted the governor, shook hands with Major Rovalez, whom he asked if he had been out to Villa Eden to see his family, as he had been some days upon his lower coast plantations.

The major had been to Villa Eden the day before, and all were well.

Then Senor Camblas informed the governor that he had unpleasant news for him, yet deemed it his duty to at once make it known.

"Out with it, Senor Camblas, for suspense is often worse than the reality."

"Well, Eccellenza, I think there is an uprising of the Cubans afoot."

"Why, my dear Senor Camblas, how remarkable, for Major Rovalez has just brought me about the same information."

The Senor Camblas looked surprised.

"Tell me, senor, what you have discovered?" continued the governor-general.

"I have, as I said, been several days upon my lower plantation, Eccellenza, and my overseer, a most reliable man, gave me to understand that a strange vessel was seen hovering off the coast by day, and only last night made a landing."

"Did she run ashore, senor?"

"No, Eccellenza, but ran into a secure harbor on my estate, and landed some bales of goods and half a hundred men."

"Did he describe the vessel?"

"Yes, he said that she was a *goleta*, lying low in the water, very sharp fore and aft, and carried a vast spread of canvas."

"That answers the description of your vessel, major."

"It does, senor."

"And what was done with these men and goods landed, Senor Camblas?"

"My overseer said that they were taken off to the mountains, he thought, by pack-mules brought down for them, as by an understanding with those on the vessel."

"This looks like an insurrectionary movement surely."

"It does, Eccellenza."

"And the vessel fits the craft of that young Rebello?"

"So I thought, Senor Eccellenza, yet cared not to say so as you seemed not to believe evil of the young man."

"Do you think he can be secretly an Insurgent, and not a pirate?"

"His father was before him, Senor Eccellenza."

Don Quixote started to his feet.

"Can this be true?"

"Yes, senor."

"How know you this, Senor Camblas?"

"His father was the American naval officer, who married the beautiful Senorita Rebello, and he became involved in an insurrectionary movement, won the name of the Sea Insurgent and was executed by the captain-general, along with twenty others who had raised the flag of revolt against Spain, in Cuba."

"And you are sure that this is the son of the Sea Insurgent?"

"I know him to be, senor."

"Then you think that the boy is following in his father's footsteps, senor?"

"Without doubt, Eccellenza."

"And if I had him in my power, I should hang him, you think?"

"It would be safe to do so."

"And your opinion, Major Rovalez?"

"The same, Eccellenza, and I only regret your good heart permitted him to escape."

"I have him again in my power, senors."

The two plotters looked surprised, and stepping to the door of the inner room Don Quixote threw it open and called out:

"Senor, come here!"

It was Angelo Rebello who came forth, and he was dressed in his handsome sailor suit.

Both the planter and the soldier were amazed, and looked at each other, then at the governor for an explanation, while Rebello, taking no notice whatever of their presence, said:

"You wish to see me, Eccellenza?"

"Yes, I wish to say to these gentlemen a few words in your presence."

"I desire to say that after your former release, you came to me here and told me that you were the son of the Sea Insurgent, who had been executed for a crime which he was guiltless of, giving me for proof the word of a priest who had received the dying confession of a man who had had the arms placed on your father's *goleta*, and the papers that condemned him, being bribed to do so by one whom you did not know, nor would the padre make known to you."

"I wish to tell you before these gentlemen that you gave me to understand that you could root out the band known as Lagoon Pirates, if I would allow you to secretly arm your vessel, and ship a crew to aid you."

"This you did, and you were lying in wait for pirates off-shore, when the Sea Pearl ran upon you in the darkness."

"I wish to say that you have hunted these pirates out, captured their retreat and booty, and turned over to me a score of prisoners, and that the mysterious vessel reported upon the coast by the senors, has been yours, doing good service."

"I would further state, Senor Rebello, in reward for your most gallant services rendered me, I have given orders to Captain Toriente to turn his vessel into a cruiser to guard the coast, and your pretty craft is to be changed into my yacht, with you as her commander, with the rank of lieutenant."

"Now, senors, having shown you how your plot against this gallant young officer has fallen upon you, I will say to Major Rovalez that his orders to proceed to Spain by the first ship, shall at once be made out, and he may state that he goes upon special service, while you, Senor Camblas, I will protect from public knowledge of your crime, for so I will call it, on account of your noble daughter, but be assured that my eyes will be upon you as a dangerous man."

"Senor Rovalez and Camblas, *adios*."

The governor bowed coldly, and the two men, white-faced and deeply chagrined, left his presence.

"Now, Senor Rebello, permit me to say to you, that your duties will begin at once, and the prize-money, from your pirate booty, with the sum offered by the Spanish Government, will enable you to bring your mother and sister to Havana, where you can locate them more pleasantly than where they now are."

"Ah, Eccellenza, you are more than good to me," said Rebello with deep feeling.

"No more than you deserve, Lieutenant

Rebello, for do not forget that I condemned you as an innocent man, and very nearly executed you as such, urged on by Rovalez and Camblas."

"No, I wish to make amends, and I will feel that I have done so by getting the major out of your way as a rival, and if you do not win and wed that beautiful girl, Valita Camblas, why I'll marry her myself."

"Now Senor Rebello, Major Concha, for I have promoted him to the rank held by Rovalez, will instruct you in your duties as an officer of Spain, and commander of the governor-general's armed yacht."

With a heart full of joy Angelo Rebello left the presence of the governor-general, for the clouds that had loomed over his life seemed to have drifted away forever.

THE END.

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